

Benefiting From Conferences

When parents are involved with what happens at school, children achieve more and school experiences are generally more positive.

By becoming involved, parents send the message to their children that school is important and demonstrate to teachers that they are interested in their child's education.

A parent-teacher conference gives parents that chance to

- ❖ meet the teachers
- ❖ ask questions
- ❖ learn more about what their children are doing in school
- ❖ discover more information about school performance.

Here are some ways to make parent teacher conferences more effective:

1. **Have a purpose for meeting**
 - a. Make a list of questions that you would like to ask the teacher
 - b. Make a list of concerns that you would like to discuss.
 - c. It is okay to share with the teacher that you have questions and concerns, you are also less likely to forget.
Examples: "what are my child's strengths and weaknesses?" or "are there any special instructions or things I can do at home to help them be more successful?"
2. **Be an active participant:**
 - a. Ask questions, always be sure you understand what something means and what you have heard is what is truly being said.
3. **Focus on Positives:**
 - a. Try to focus on solutions to problems rather than just on the problems
 - b. Come up with ways you and the teacher can work together to change behavior or performance.
4. **Talk to your child about conferences:**
 - a. Let them know you will be going to school for a conference with the teacher
 - b. Ask them if they have any concerns they want to address before you go
 - c. Ask the school and child if they would like to participate. If the child does not wish to attend or the school does not allow them to attend, share with your child what was discussed.
 - d. Be positive about what you have learned by praising their strengths and discussing ways they can improve any weaknesses.
5. **Focus on cooperation:**
 - a. Establish a partnership with the teacher; you both contribute to your child's development and performance in important ways
 - b. Working together is the best way to get the most out of your child's education: parent-teacher conferences puts this partnership into practice.

Being prepared, actively participating, focusing on positives, sharing information, and focusing on cooperation will make the parent-teacher conferences useful, positive experiences!

Making Parent-Teacher Conferences Work

Conferences are a time when you and your child's teacher sit down together and talk about how to best maximize your child's educational opportunities.

Conferences give teachers an opportunity to address your parental concerns and to answer questions about what you can do to further your child's education

Here are some ways to make conferences work:

1. Value the conference time:
 - a. Start off on the right foot by being on time.
 - b. If you cannot make the scheduled time, request another
 - c. If you need someone to watch your children, ask the school if there is a place the child can go while you meet with the teacher
 - d. Stay calm and try to work together for the mutual purpose of improving your child's education.
2. Plan to share information
 - a. Your child's teacher will probably come prepared with samples of work and ideas to help your child do even better in school.
 - b. Talk to your child beforehand so you can be prepared with information:
 - What's your favorite subject?
 - What's your least favorite subject?
 - Is there anything he/she would like you to talk about with the teacher?
 - c. Be willing to discuss your child's homelife; child's personality, problems, habits, and hobbies
 - d. Discuss your child's reaction to homework, home rules and responsibilities.
 - e. What type of discipline works best at home
3. Ask questions
 - a. "How does my child get along with others? Does he/she make friends easily? Does my child work well with others?"
 - b. "What are my child's best and worst subjects? What are my child's work habits?"
 - c. "Does my child participate in class discussions and activities?"
 - d. "What are some things I can do at home to help my child improve at school?"
 - e. Ask clarifying questions if you need to.

Education in the Home

As a parent, you can make your home educationally stimulating and an accessory to educational success!

Here are some ways to help promote education within your home:

1. Help your children create and keep schedules:

Most people are more productive if they set aside time for study, chores, work, and fun on a weekly basis

- Make schoolwork and other learning experiences top priority in your home schedules
- The schedule should be flexible enough to allow tradeoffs and shifting things around when necessary.

2. Set a good example for your children:

Show your child that learning, reading, and studying are important skills they will need throughout their lives.

- Let them see you reading or doing quiet study work at the same time they are studying or doing homework.
- Have items available that stimulate your children's interest in learning.

3. Use daily activities as learning experiences:

Chores as simple as sorting the laundry by color can help children practice important skills and reinforce what is being learned in school.

- A more complex chore like making a shopping list can foster skills like problem solving, critical thinking, and using resource materials.

Family trips, short or long, provide good opportunities for your children to become good observers and share their ideas and experiences.

4. Monitor recreational activities:

Some television and tablet applications are very educational and can help with development of vocabulary and general knowledge, yet too much screen time can be counterproductive. Allow some time for educational screen time as well as fun screen time.

- Be aware of the messages some programs have, like excessive violence. There are plenty of programs that are informative and express values you might endorse as well.
- Help your children keep a healthy balance between screen time and other hobbies and interests.
 - Choose some toys and games as an alternative: they can foster creativity, reasoning and problem-solving skills, as well as math and reading skills

5. Encourage your children to share information:

Set aside some time for family members to share something about their day. While preparing a meal or eating said meal is a great time to share. Discuss what they are learning, any new ideas, ask questions, correct mistakes, and encourage appropriate attitudes and behaviors.

Improving Home-School Relations

Parents and family members can work with the school to promote a positive self-concept in your child

Improving home-school relations can be approached with a variety of purposes.

- Both parents and the school should attempt to foster a wider community interest in educational values
- Both parents and teacher should try to provide each other with instruction, information, and guidance to aid the education of their children

Two main ways to improve home-school relations

1. Make increased efforts toward improving communication between you and your child's school staff
 - You can learn about your child's school performance, capabilities, and interests
2. Work more often with your child at home to improve his or her educational abilities.
 - Reinforcing at home can help your child acquire skills that will be useful in the classroom

Communication can be in many forms:

- Notes
- Conferences
- Newsletters
- Phone chains
- Bulletin boards
- Recorded messages

Helping your child become a home learner directly involves you in their education.

- You can help by establishing discipline in the form of completing daily tasks
- Model and emphasize good study habits and the importance in acquisition of knowledge
- Monitor home and school activities, which are essential to their social and academic development

Create a contract with your child, as a way to supervise their homework

Provide incentives for good work

Listening More Effectively

Effective listening is one of the most important ingredients to healthy and productive communication

We listen in two ways:
Passively & Actively

Passive listeners hear most of the words being said and will occasionally look at the person speaking to them. Their nonverbal behavior sends the message that they are really not interested.

Active listeners quickly establish good eye contact with the speaker and give verbal and non-verbal clues that show they are engaged in the conversation.

An active listener can accurately report both what was said and how they felt about the topic discussed.

Here are some ways to listen more effectively:

- ✖ Model good listening skills
 - Be aware that children imitate what they see
- ✖ Take time to listen
 - Set aside structured conversation time so all family members can discuss what is important to them
- ✖ Choose a good setting
 - The area should be distraction free, put away or turn off devices until the conversation is over.
- ✖ Accept feelings
 - Feelings are important and should be shared and accepted.
 - Resist the temptation to deny or modify their feelings, how you perceive something might not be how they perceive it.
 - If your concerned, seek help from the school counselor.
- ✖ Be aware of non-verbal behavior
 - The slightest changes in the way you sit and attend to the conversation can have the biggest effect on your child.
 - They can tell when you are interested in what they are saying
- ✖ Try not be judgement free
 - The same idea as accepting feelings, how children perceive things is very different than how we as adults perceive things. (It can be a valuable teaching moment, too)

Staying Involved in School

Children greatly benefit when parents take an active role in what goes on in school.

Here are some ways to become involved in your child's education and help them succeed in school:

- ✓ Know your child's teachers
 - attend school functions where you will be introduced to the teacher like back to school night or conferences
 - Over the course of the school year try to stay in touch by writing brief notes or emails
- ✓ Take part in school activities
 - Ask the school how you can become involved
 - Some ways are: volunteering in the school library, cafeteria, field trips, and after-school programs. Fundraising events are also a good way to be involved and even meet other parents.
 - Children are likely to get excited when members of their family show up at school to be a part of these activities.
- ✓ Make your home a learning place
 - Make the most of after-school time: set aside a time and distraction free space for homework and studying.
 - Try to engage in quiet activities around the house while you child is doing their work after school
 - Review their homework, try to help if mistakes were made but completion is the #1 goal. Teachers go over homework and use it as a guide for overall student understanding.
 - One assignment at a time: sort them by easiest to hardest assignment
 - Have educational games and books around the house to promote extra learning and practice.

Improving Study Skills

Successful studying takes time and effort.

It is important to spend time on schoolwork outside of the classroom.

Good study skills can make learning easier and greatly improve performance in school.

The achievement earned after studying is extremely rewarding for students.

Here are some ways to help improve study skills:

Model and Support Studying:

- Read or do something quietly while your child studies
- Create a space and time designated to studying; devices and TVs should be turned off and put away
- Praise and reinforce your child for studying
- Help your child study: make up practice questions and quiz them

Establish Goals and Objectives:

- Setting specific goals makes it more likely that the task will get completed: "I will study my vocabulary for 30 minutes"
- Realistic goals are more manageable and make it less frustrating: "I will study everyday this week for 1 hour" is unrealistic but can be shaped into a more realistic goal.
- Cramming or waiting until the last minute makes realistic goals impossible.
 - Spread tasks over several study sessions
- Time management is also an effective strategy:
 - Make a list of all assignments and number them in order of importance (even write the date down next to the assignment for when it is due)
 - Crossing something off a list is very reinforcing

Value Independence and Personal Style:

- There are many different ways to study material
 - Often, teachers can provide some methods on how to study the material. Check –in with them for some advice so you can help at home. It is also a great way to show your involvement.
- Allow your child to develop their own style of studying.
 - Test scores and assignments grades will determine if that style is effective, change it up if needed.

Building Confidence

Effective communication is a fundamental tool to use to help build confidence in children.

Communication is an integral part of our day-to-day experiences.

Open communication with children helps them feel valuable, develop skills to use in their interactions with others

When we can effectively express our feelings and are understood, we tend to feel better about ourselves.

Children need to know that their thoughts and feelings are worthwhile

Be a Helpful & Active Listener

Active listening is key because you can reflect back on what was heard.

By listening this way it shows the child that you care about what they are saying and that you understand.

Reflecting back gives the child the chance to correct the person they are talking to if they were misunderstood, the child might elaborate or provide more details (a very good skill to practice and develop).

Reflecting back also is a great way to provide positive reinforcement to promote and encourage improvement.

Pay Attention:

To show you are listening, give the child cues ,like nodding your head or making small comments “uh-huh”

Try not to interrupt them until they are finished.

Younger children can talk in circles or take some time to get what they want to say out, it is appropriate to interrupt them to bring them back to topic, try to help them get out what they really want to say. Look for opportunities to provide encouragement for what they are saying. “I’d like to hear more about that!”

Think of the communication with your child as a learning opportunity. Not only are you teaching them to be polite and sincere, you might also have an opportunity to teach them something else!

Provide Stimulation:

In addition to praising and listening there are various experiences that promote increase in knowledge and confidence: read to your children, have them read to you, go to the zoo, park, or museum. (even going food shopping together can be fun and stimulating)

Be a Participant:

Being involved in all aspects of the child’s life is a major confidence booster.

Being involved lets your children know that they and their endeavors are important to you.

Building Self-Awareness

Self-awareness means gaining knowledge about behaviors, actions, perceptions, perspectives, and images.

A CAN-DO attitude and acceptance of strengths and weaknesses is a great way to create a positive self-image.

Talk about feelings, desires, and concerns:

Find positive statements about school or home activities to share together. Take some time to talk about feelings, desires, concerns, and problems that you see with your child's behaviors, actions, perspectives, and images. They can be positive observations which help boost confidence and promote positive self-awareness. If they are negative, use it as an opportunity to reshape how these things play out and alternatives to utilize next time. Help them turn negative or weaknesses into positives or strengths.

By talking about feelings, desires, concerns, and problems, encouraging self-monitoring and self-reward, discovering and addressing personal problems, identifying strengths, and teaching the value of diversity, you can help your child develop self-awareness.

Controlling Anger

Anger is a common childhood behavior.

A child might act out for various reasons but ultimately they have not learned other ways of dealing with problems.

Getting control of anger help with friendships, dealing with conflicts effectively, and assert his or her needs is a more positive way.

Recognize signs of anger

Help you child identify WHEN they are becoming angry. For some, muscles tighten, heart beats faster, and their face and neck may feel hot. Explain that when those signs are present, there are ways to control them, like counting to ten slowly, or taking a few slow and deep breaths..

Emphasize importance of expressing feelings

Sometimes telling others that you are angry is a helpful way in dealing with it. It is usually best to do this before the actual anger outburst or after an outburst when everyone has calmed down. "What you are doing/did makes me feel angry".

When talking about anger, use words that express feelings without being accusing or sarcastic: "I felt angry when I missed the game." opposed to "It is your fault I was late for the game, you never call me on time."

Discuss loss of control in positive ways

At times, humans lose control before we have the chance to put our skills into actions. If this happens with your child, wait until he/she has calmed down and then talk about what they could have done differently. Remind them that it is okay to get angry and make mistakes but jut has long as we learn from then and don't act on our anger.

Accept anger and expect it to change

Help your child see that feeling mad from time to time is okay. People get angry for a reason and will pass when those things that anger us change. Discuss the things that make them angry, triggers them, and then identify was to avoid or handle them.

Dealing with Anxiety

Anxiety or concern are natural reactions for children when dealing with new or unknown situations.

Doing well in school, being accepted by others, and meeting expectations are examples of when a child might feel anxious or concerned.

Sometimes children feel anxious and concerned relating to situations at home with their family and future.

When anxiety begins to have a negative effect on personal, social, and overall school functioning, it is important that we step in to provide assistance.

1. Listen to you child:
 - Children can internalize their fears which can cause an increase in anxiety.
 - They might not feel like they have anyone to talk to about how they are feeling or what is going on.
 - Provide opportunities for listening and sharing about fears and concerns
 - Be supportive and understanding, how we perceive things is different then how children perceive things.
2. Share ways of dealing with anxiety
 - There are several books that have stories about children who are anxious about home, family, and school situations.
 - Get in contact with the school counselor. They have tools to help with anxiety at school and would able to assist with utilizing these tools at home
3. Keep track of activities
 - Create a daily schedule to help manage activities (include tests/projects)
 - Start each day by looking at the schedule and make changes as necessary
 - Sometimes a child can feel anxious or concerned because they have a lot to do. This will help break down any and all activities so they don't feel like they have to do everything at once.
4. Look for signs of anxiety
 - Complaining about the future
 - Difficulty concentrating
 - Changes in speech patterns
 - Easily distracted
 - Impulsivity
 - Not engaged in school work
 - Problems sleeping
 - Expressing concerns about fears
 - Rapid breathing
 - Being nauseous
 - Having headaches
 - Stomach aches
 - Unusual fatigue or tiredness
 - Avoid specific situations

- Recognizing some of these is a great way to start a conversation or seek assistance in school. Recognizing problems early on is often the first step in reducing them.
5. Keep track of progress
- Provide praise and reinforcement when your child is able to handle their anxiety positively. Sometimes it is as simple as talking about it. "Thank you so much for sharing your concerns with me, I know it can be difficult to talk about."
 - Stay in contact with your child's teacher and school about progress. Sharing of information as a team is a great way to support you child and they will feel supported as well.

Developing Self-Esteem

If a person likes him or herself and feels good about what he or she can do, he or she will be motivated to succeed.

PRAISE is a pivotal technique to use it can show a child that they are valued, doing a good job, and is worthwhile

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITISM can also have a positive influence on improving self-esteem.

- Developing and teaching new ideas, concepts, and skills

How to use Constructive Criticism:

1. Focus on Delivery, Not Just Content:

- HOW you say something can be as important as WHAT you say
- Use words that clearly state the positive behavior you want to encourage
- Reflect how you truly feel about what your child has done: specific schoolwork, an achievement, or a kind act

2. Be Sincere:

- An important motto to keep in mind: "Don't say it if you don't mean it"
- It might be better to not say anything at all than to say something negative
- With some thought you can almost always find a way to honestly compliment in a positive way
- Be careful not to minimize constructive criticism by adding a qualifying statement: "That's a great solution, but you should have known better than to get into this predicament in the first place."

3. Use Praise with Rules:

- a child needs to know that it is important to follow rules
- If a child has rules at home and they are followed, praising for those accomplishments is going to increase their self-esteem but also increase their chances of following the rules all the time.
- The praise or reward shows the child that you value their compliance (good behavior)

4. Offer Solutions:

- Instead of pointing out faults, identify answers or solutions to problems.
- Criticism becomes constructive when solutions are offered or help in finding them is provided

5. Keep Communication Open:

- Just telling that a mistake was made does little to improve the effect the mistake might have had.
- With constructive criticism and open communication you can find out what happened, what they were thinking and what they think can be done to improve the situation

Being Assertive

Being assertive is a constructive way to solve problems

Assertive children can stand up for themselves but still show respect for others

Here are some ways you can help guide your child to be more assertive:

Discuss Problems and Explore Solutions

Discuss situations or scenarios that your child has experienced or explore scenarios they might experience. Talk about 3 ways you could react to the situation and what the consequences would be for each: aggressive, passive, and assertive. Provide concrete examples and appropriate solutions.

Example:

"Let's say Mike calls you a name. You could hit him (aggressive), you could cry (passive), or you could look him in the eyes and tell him to stop or you will tell the teacher (assertive).

Know that assertiveness might not change someone else's behavior but it will always provide your child with the opportunity to express their feelings in a positive way.

Recognize Feelings and Express them in a Positive Way

Children often push their feelings aside or express them in a negative way. Help them recognize and express their feelings and use appropriate reactions to them.

Example:

Instead of hitting others in response to frustration: "it makes me mad when you do that." "I don't like it when you do that."; or "I won't play with you if you keep doing that."

