



sunfield

CENTER FOR AUTISM, ADHD, AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
300 N. Fifth Ave., Suite 210 • Ann Arbor, MI 48104
www.sunfieldcenter.com • 734.222.9277

Parent Teacher Conferences – Tips for Parents

By: Amy Nasamran, M.A. & Suzi Naguib, Psy. D.



Now that the school year has started and students are settling into their new classrooms, parent-teacher conferences are right around the corner. Parent-teacher conferences can be a good opportunity for parents and teachers to create a home-school partnership that can help facilitate student learning and growth over the year. However, these meetings can sometimes be uncomfortable or stressful for parents and teachers alike. Parents have reported feeling negatively judged for their child's mistakes, guilty about not helping their child enough, or too intimidated to ask questions (Minke & Anderson, 2003), while some teachers have indicated frustrations about feeling underprepared to work with parents or overwhelmed by the time

constraints of the meetings. Commonly, parents and teachers may not see eye-to-eye regarding how to approach particular student issues and/or how to resolve them.

Despite the potential difficulties that can arise in parent-teacher conferences, these meetings can serve as an important ground for facilitating student success. Decades of research have shown a strong link between parent involvement in a student's education and a student's success at school. For example, parent involvement has been linked to student success across academic, social, and emotional areas, including higher academic achievement, more favorable social-emotional outcomes, fewer behavior problems, greater motivation, and better attendance for students with and without disabilities (Frew, Zhou, Duran, Kwok, & Benz, 2013; Georgiady & Romano, 2002). These benefits have been shown across students of all ages, including students in high school (Catsambis, 2001). Importantly, parent involvement has also been shown to have long-term benefits, such that parent involvement in elementary school has been linked to students' higher academic achievement and lower drop out rates in high school (Barnard, 2004).

Given the importance of the home-school collaboration, participating in parent-teacher conferences can be a good way to promote student success. Below are some practical suggestions for parents to make parent-teacher conferences a more positive and effective two-way collaboration to promote optimal student learning and success.

Tell the teacher about your child – You are the best expert of knowing your child. Many teachers don't have an understanding of what happens once a student leaves school. Providing your best knowledge of what your child is like at home, their interests, and any issues that may affect him/her at school can help teachers better understand the student from a different perspective. This can help the teacher better plan your child's educational programming.

Talk and listen – Parents and teachers should openly communicate about a student's current educational performance and future goals. In addition to sharing information about your child, actively listen to the teacher's input and ask questions, this will facilitate an effective two-way conversation.

Don't be afraid to ask for clarification – Teachers are knowledgeable and good at what they do. They may have become so familiar with educational language and jargon that they forget to explain specific terms and labels. Many parents are usually unfamiliar with language specific to the educational field, so you should not be

afraid to ask teachers to clarify when necessary. This also communicates your genuine engagement and interest in your child's education.

Ask about academics, but don't forget about social-emotional functioning – Schools tend to focus heavily on academic performance; however, it is also important to assess how your child is doing socially and emotionally at school. To get ready to address academics, review your child's homework and tests before the conference and prepare any questions you may have. Regarding your child's social-emotional health, you can ask about how your child is getting along with others at school or about his/her friend group.

Be ready to share and hear about strengths and concerns – The focus of the meeting should be on how well your child is doing in school, as well as how he/she can do even better. Discuss your child's strengths and areas for improvement. Sharing what your child is good at and his/her challenges can shape the meeting into a well-rounded conversation that isn't solely focused on concerns. Try to not become defensive when hearing about your child's challenges. Instead, try to ask the teacher how you can help your child make progress in his/her challenge area.

Get involved – Ask your teacher how you can help by becoming more involved in school activities, or what you can do at home to help your child do better at school. Research has suggested that parent involvement across various school activities both at home and at school can facilitate student success (Frew et al., 2013). Teachers may have suggestions for homework help at home, attending plays or sports game at school, or even volunteering in the classroom.

Schedule another time to talk – For some districts, formal parent-teacher conferences are not routinely scheduled. You can request a meeting with your child's teacher to discuss current performance and make plans for future progress even if your child is not currently struggling at school. For parents who do attend parent-teacher conferences, scheduling another time to talk can be a good way to follow up on your child's educational progress throughout the year.

Sunfield Center psychologists are available to help children, siblings and families. Our psychologists advocate for students in the school setting, attend IEP meetings and conduct behavioral observations and school consultations. To schedule an appointment, please call us at (734) 222-9277.

References:

- Barnard, W. M. (2004). Parent involvement in elementary school and educational attainment. *Children and Youth Services Review, 26*(1), 39-62. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/10.1016/j.childyouth.2003.11.002>
- Caplan, J. (2000). Building strong family-school partnerships to support high student achievement. *The Informed Educators Series*. Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service.
- Catsambis, S. (2001). Expanding knowledge of parental involvement in children's secondary education: Connections with high school seniors' academic success. *Social Psychology of Education, 5*, 149-177.
- Frew, L. A., Zhou, Q., Duran, J., Kwok, O., & Benz, M. R. (2013). Effect of school-initiated parent outreach activities on parent involvement in school events. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 24*(1), 27-35. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.msu.edu.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/docview/1440032907?accountid=12598>
- Georgiady, N. & Romano, L. (2002). *Positive parent-teacher conferences*. Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.
- Minke, K. & Anderson, K. (2003). Restructuring routine parent-teacher conferences: The family-school conference model. *The Elementary School Journal, 104*(1), 49-69.