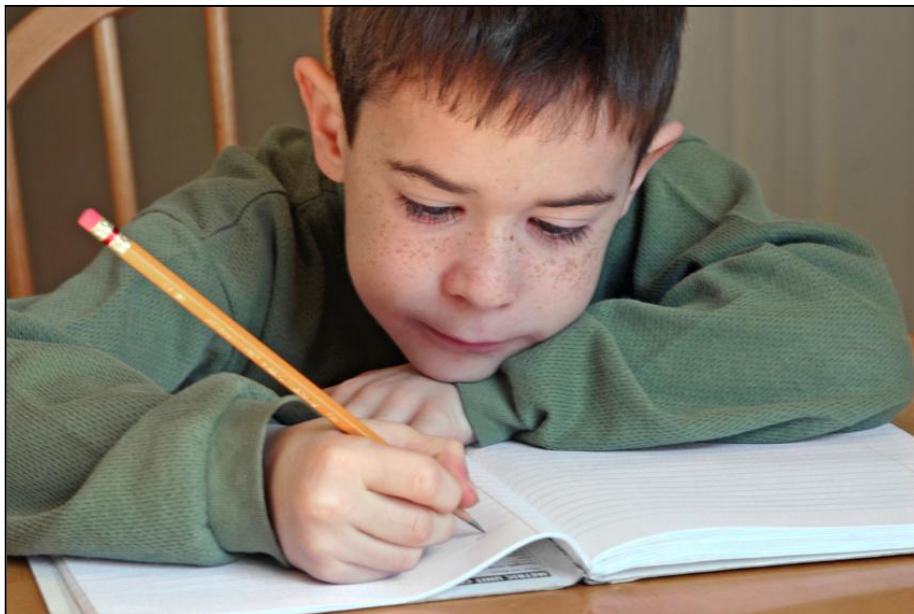


How to Make the Most Out of Parent -Teacher Conferences



**By
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About the Author

Dr. Ruth Jacoby is a veteran educator and charter school leader. During her 35+- year career, she has worked as a teacher and principal in private and charter schools serving students from preschool age through 9th grade. She is the co-author of the book series on effective communication, *Teacher Talk!*, *Parent Talk!*, *Principal Talk!*, *School Board Talk*, *Test Talk!*, and *Homework Talk!*, published by Jossey-Bass. Dr. Jacoby currently serves as Executive Director of Education for Somerset Schools in Florida.

Introduction



As a parent or guardian, you would do anything for your child. One of the best things you can do is insure that your child is getting the most out of school. Your involvement is absolutely critical.

How do you start getting more involved with your child's education? What can you expect from your child's teacher and school?

There is no manual written for this. Part of being a parent is to be a strong advocate for your child. Being involved in your child's education means making sure that he or she is doing the best to achieve proficiency or higher across the subject grades.

Parents and teachers need to come together as a team to ensure that every child is progressing and reaching his/her highest academic and social potential. In particular, if your child has special needs or if you are dealing with a special situation at home, communication with your child's teacher and the school are important.

If you are concerned about your child's performance at school, don't wait until you receive interim reports or report cards. Contact your child's teacher right away to schedule a conference.

Remember, you are your child's most important advocate!

Setting Up a Parent Teacher Conference

Prior to the Actual Meeting

- Learn the names of all the teachers your child may come in contact with at school.
- Learn the names of the principal, assistant principal, guidance counselor, grade team leader and ESE specialist (special needs) if needed.
- If you feel there is a need for a meeting, contact your child's teacher by email, phone call, and/or letter. Be sure to state clearly the reason for the meeting. Below are two sample forms, a letter and request form, that you can use.

A. Sample Letter Requesting a Conference

Dear Ms. Red and Ms. Writer,

Can you contact me for a conference as soon as possible? I am concerned that my child's grades have taken a tremendous drop in reading. I try working with him at home by reading every night but he is struggling with knowing all the words.

I am available every morning before the start of school as long as there is a safe place I can leave John while we are meeting. Please call my cell - 555- 561- 9777.

Thanks,

Mrs. R. Jones (mother of John Hughes)

B. Sample Form Requesting a Conference

Child's Name: _____

Parent's Name: _____

Best Time to Meet: _____

Best Day of the Week to Meet: _____

Best Time to Receive a Phone Call: _____

My Concerns:

Thank you for seeing me at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Your Name

What If Your Child's Teacher Requests a Conference?

Every parent dreads that call or note from a teacher asking for a parent conference. It is natural to feel defensive and worried. Just remember, this is your opportunity to learn more about what is going on with your child at school.

Take a deep breath and be proactive. Follow the same steps described above by writing down your questions and concerns to share with your child's teacher. Here is a sample letter/email that you can send to the teacher acknowledging his/her request for a conference:

Sample Note Acknowledging Teacher's Request for a Conference

September 9, 2010

Dear Ms. Right,

I have received your request for a meeting on Monday the 17th of September at 7:30 AM.

I am looking forward to seeing you so we can work together to assist my child with her reading.

Yours truly,

Mrs. (name) _____

Prepare for the Conference



You will want to tell the teacher(s) everything that you are noticing at home and what you are trying to do to assist your child. You also want to be able to describe the changes you want to see in your child.

You can use the form below to write your notes. You will bring these notes with you to the conference.

Bring any school work samples and test papers that you have saved that indicate what you have noticed. Be sure to include samples of the best work your child has done as well as those that were not up to your expectations.

Identify the Problem

Example: John is having difficulty doing his reading homework and hates to read for pleasure.

Describe what is happening at home in as much detail as possible.

Example: John tries to read every night but he can't recognize words and doesn't seem to know what they mean. He can't seem to sound out the letter sounds that he has learned since he was in preschool. I have to review his homework because he does a careless job on it during after care. He often gets frustrated and leaves the room.

Describe what changes you want to see.

John starts to enjoy reading and is able to read on grade level. He completes his homework without getting frustrated.

Action Plan

Next, think of some ideas of what you can do at home to help your child. This will be the beginning of an Action Plan you discuss with the teacher.

Examples:

- I will read and sign John's planner every day
- I will write in the planner if John is having trouble reading at home
- I will write in the planner if John seems to be improving in attitude and skills
- I will request another meeting with the teacher in writing when I think it's necessary

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Questions for the Teacher

Prepare a list of questions you have and bring them with you to the meeting.

Examples:

- What can I do at home to assist John with his reading?
- Why are his skills dropping?
- What can you do for him in school?

- How can the after school staff assist John with his homework so he is gaining skills and not just completing it as fast as he can so he can go outside and play?
- Does my child need tutoring? I really can't afford it.
- Is there something wrong with my child?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

A day before the conference, call ahead and confirm the meeting time and place. Make sure you make arrangements for your child to stay in a safe place while you are meeting.

At the Conference



- Bring your notes with you.
 - Be prepared to listen and learn about what the teacher is observing and how he or she is trying to solve the problem.
 - Ask your questions and take notes on the teacher's responses.
 - Repeat what the teacher says to make sure that you understand.
-
- Offer assistance. Ask, "What can I do?"
 - Before you leave, make sure that you have made a plan together with the teacher that clearly lays out how the school will help and what you will do at home.
 - Set a date with the school for a follow up conference on the phone or in person in 2-3 weeks to check on the progress your child is making. If your child is not improving, let the school personnel know and ask for more assistance.
 - Ask for an email address or phone number so you can report to the teacher if there are any changes occurring during the two week plan.
 - If the school uses student planners, ask if you can write notes to the teacher in your child's planner and whether the teacher can write a response in the planner. Tell the teacher that you will check it every night.
 - Share the outcome of the conference with your child.

More Tips for a Great Conference

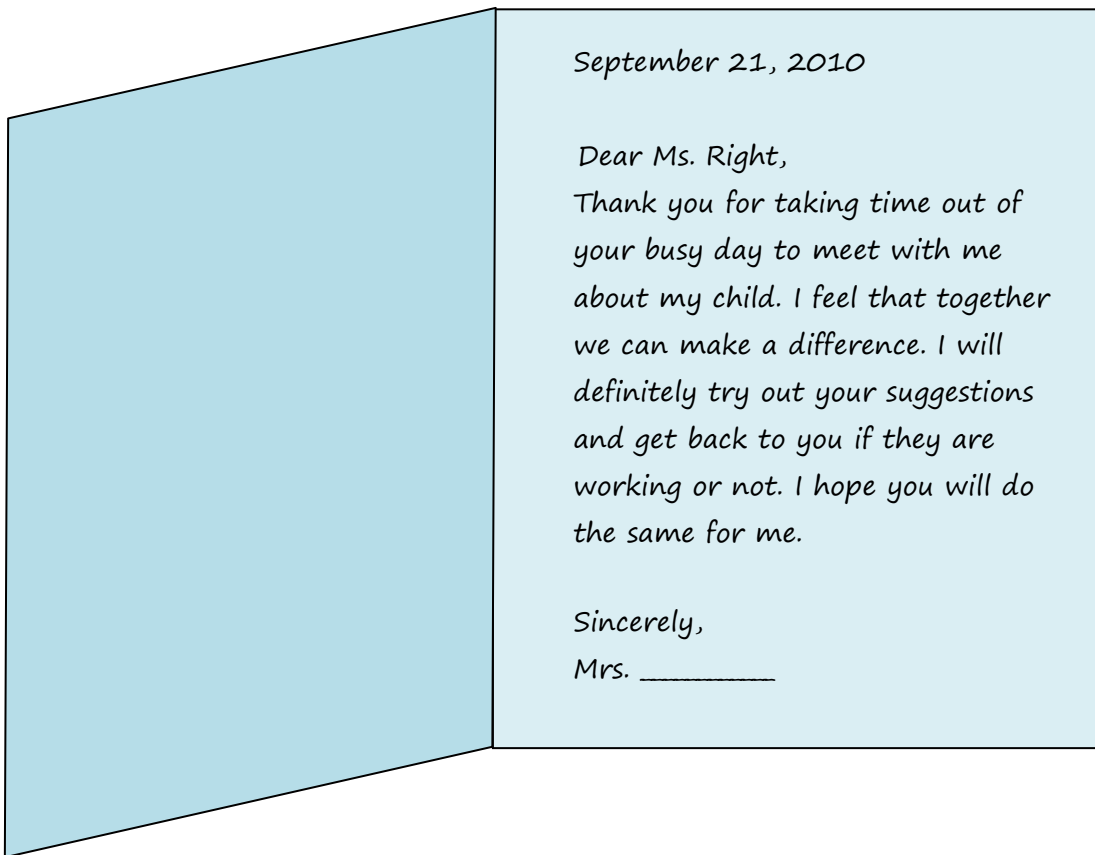
- ✓ Smile!
- ✓ Shake hands with the teacher.
- ✓ Greet the teacher by his or her correct name.
- ✓ Stay interested and focused throughout the conference.
- ✓ Turn off your cell phone.
- ✓ Listen to the teacher's concerns and reflect on them.
- ✓ Give the teacher time to answer without interrupting.
- ✓ Wait for teacher's response to each one of your questions – take notes to make sure you remember everything that the teacher says.



Follow Up after the Conference

Teachers love to get thank you notes! Don't forget to write a short and simple thank you to the teacher following the conference.

Sample Thank You Note



Keep Track of Your Child's Progress

One way to keep track of your child's progress is to keep a portfolio of his/her work at home. A portfolio is a great way to watch your child's progress from grade to grade. You can use a file folder, a box, or a plastic portfolio with compartments.



Put in the portfolio:

- ✓ Copies of past assignments – good and not so good
- ✓ Copies of communications from teachers
- ✓ Samples of best work
- ✓ Samples of work that demonstrates areas of concern
- ✓ Tests
- ✓ Assessments
- ✓ Copies of report cards, interim reports, previous conference reports
- ✓ Copies of State reports on FCAT and other standardized test results



Conclusion

Remember – you need to be part of the team to ensure your child’s success at school. You are your child’s first teacher and advocate throughout his or her education. Become a good listener when your child and teacher speak. Attend school meetings, read all school literature, stay current with emails and web information and become a dynamic participant in school happenings. There are no easy solutions, but it is your responsibility to become involved, be consistent and follow up.

