

you and the teacher to discuss the progress and potential of your own child.

The following questions can serve as a guide to areas you may wish to discuss:

- What is my child's ability level? (The teacher will probably not be permitted to give you an IQ score, but she/he can give you a general idea). Is she or he working up to ability?
- What group is he or she in? Why?
- How is she or he doing in mathematics (reading, science, etc.)? May I see some of his/her work?
- What books are being used?
- Has she/he shown any special interests or abilities?
- How does the child get along with classmates? What about participation in group activities? Does she/he show any leadership qualities?
- Are there discipline problems?

The teacher, too, will have some questions . . . not trying to pry into your personal life, but only to obtain information that will help her or him to work better with your child. Be ready to discuss such areas as the following:

- Your child's reaction to school
- Health and emotional problems
- Hobbies, special interests, and abilities
- Homework—how and where
- Rules and responsibilities at home
- The type of discipline that works at home.

Ask the teacher how you can help at home with any problem areas. Jot down notes at the conference or immediately after. Leave promptly when the teacher signals the end of the conference.

## After the Conference

If you forget about the conference when you leave the school, it isn't likely to have any positive results. The most important part of your role in the conference begins now.

Discuss the conference with your child. First, point out strengths. Then talk about the areas that need improvement.

Start immediately on any action you have decided to take. Did the teacher recommend books for you or your child to read? Did she or he suggest a better arrangement for studying at home? Did he/she propose getting outside help in a special area? Begin at once to follow through with the plan you and the teacher decided upon.

Feel free to call the school if you wish to check on your child's progress or if you think another conference is needed. Teachers generally value such interest on the part of parents.

Make certain your child understands that you and the teacher are working together in her/his interest. The child should know that you and the teacher are in partnership, with the sole aim of helping him/her get the best education possible.

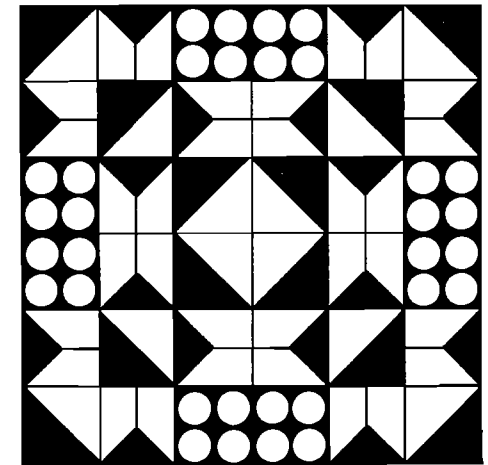
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# Let's Have a Conference:

## You and Your Child's Teacher



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You've been invited to confer with your child's teacher. Is your first reaction "What has my child done wrong?" In all probability, she or he has done nothing wrong.

Schools today are relying more and more on conferences to supplement report cards and other written forms of communication between parents and teachers. Teachers realize that they cannot do the best possible job of educating each child without the help of the child's parents. The parent can supply information about the child that could be very useful to the teacher. And the teacher can offer suggestions to parents on how they can help with the education process at home. The best way to discuss such matters is an informal face-to-face meeting. It gives both you and your child's teacher an opportunity for full exploration of progress, behavior, and the reasons for your child's successes and failures.

Is your next reaction uncertainty? "What should I ask? What will I be asked?" Or do you put the whole thing out of your mind until the conference time, letting the chips fall where they may?

The teacher will spend considerable time preparing for the conference—gathering records, samples of work, and her/his own thoughts about your child. You, too, should prepare for the conference by knowing what to expect, and then follow up with action afterward. Here are some suggestions for making your next parent-teacher conference successful.

## Before the Conference

Once you have responded to the teacher's invitation, you should prepare yourself in the following manner:

Decide what you want to ask the teacher. Discuss the forthcoming conference with your child to see if there is anything she/he would like you to talk about with the teacher. Check with your spouse and decide which aspects of your child's schoolwork are puzzling or worrying you. Ideally, both parents should attend the conference. Do you have any gripes or complaints? Now is the time to get all the facts about a school situation you may only know about secondhand.

Determine what you can tell the teacher about your child. The teacher sees only one side of your child. There may be things you know about the child that could help the teacher better understand her or him.

Tell the teacher you want to see your child's official school records. Review them with the teacher during the conference.

Get a babysitter if you have young children. Don't bring either the school child (unless specifically requested) or younger brothers or sisters to the conference. They may not only be disruptive, but they may also repeat what they hear.

Be on time. Write down the time of your appointment and arrive promptly. The teacher may have other appointments after yours.

## The Group Conference

Schools often plan a general open house for parents early in the school year. It is an opportunity for you to meet your child's teacher and the other parents and to learn about the plans for the school year, the school's policies, and the teacher's standards and expectations. It *is not* a time to discuss the specific problems of your child. It *is* a

time to ask general questions. Feel free to do so—teachers know that most parents are unfamiliar with many modern educational methods.

The teacher may prepare a talk about what the class will be doing in the coming year. She/he may answer most of the following questions if you ask them:

- What are the children studying this year?
- What are they doing in specific subject areas? What do you include in social studies? What kind of mathematics will they learn? How do you teach reading or spelling? What do children in the early grades learn from cutting and pasting?
- I see equipment with which I am unfamiliar (computers, overhead projectors, etc.). How is it used and what is it used for?
- How is the class organized? When are the children taught in groups rather than as a class? What do you do for the child who learns faster or slower than others?
- How do you evaluate the child's progress? What tests are used? What do your grades mean?
- What policies apply to this grade? What are the school rules? How much homework do you give? What kind of discipline is used?

## The Individual Conference

In many schools, each teacher schedules a conference with each child's parents as routine procedure, regardless of whether the child is having extraordinary problems. The individual conference provides a chance for