

Successful Family-Teacher Conferences

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As a teacher I... (answer honestly)

View families as a great resource.

Anticipate family conferences with dread.

Feel that a close working relationship with families is optimal for the child.

Feel threatened by families.

Enjoy working with families in the classroom.

Feel that it is too much work to involve families.

Anticipate family conferences with pleasure.

Compare brothers and sisters from the same family.

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Thinking about each statement can help us get in touch with some of our feelings about family involvement.

Our feelings about family involvement play a big role in our attitudes towards families.

We may not be comfortable talking with families!

AND

Families may not be comfortable talking with us!

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What factors might influence our attitudes towards families?

What factors might influence families' attitudes towards us?

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Why should we work to overcome any obstacles to family involvement?

Benefits to children?

1. Children feel safe.
2. Children get more consistency between home and school.

Benefits to families?

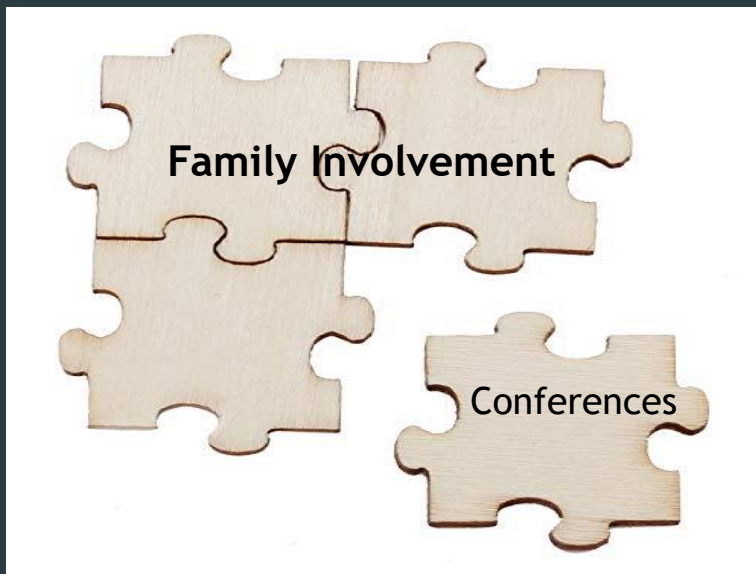
1. Family members learn about child development/age-appropriate behaviors.
2. Family members feel supported which alleviates some parenting stress.

Benefits to teachers?

1. Teachers gain a resource (materials and support)!
2. Children respond positively when their families are involved which means less stress for you!

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What does this have to do with conferences?



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Purposes of Family-Teacher Conference

- ▶ Gain a team member in a child's optimal development and education
- ▶ Document a child's progress
- ▶ Explain more about your program/classroom
- ▶ Learn more about factors affecting the child outside of school
- ▶ Allow family member(s) to express feelings, ask questions, share concerns
- ▶ Gain understanding of family members' expectations/goals
- ▶ Establish a network of communication
- ▶ Establish cooperative goals for the child

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3 Parts of a Successful Conference (with 3 parts each)

Before
During
After

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BEFORE the conference

1. Develop and maintain a positive rapport with each family from the start : lay the foundation!

- ❑ Keep the lines of communication open.
- ❑ Share positive news on a regular basis.
(emails; phone calls; apps - ClassTag, Seesaw); daily reports; newsletters etc.)
- ❑ Conference before the “scheduled conference time” if needed.

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BEFORE the conference

2. Have a thorough knowledge of child development and Developmentally Appropriate Practice - know what is appropriate for children and share this with families!

You need appropriate expectations (age appropriate & individually appropriate for each child in his/her unique context) so you can have realistic expectations.

(And help families have realistic expectations....)

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BEFORE the conference

3. Keep documentation of each child's progress so you can share specifics with families!

- ❑ Use an ongoing system that works for you to track each child (mailing labels, printed form, app/program etc.).
- ❑ Prepare a conference form for each child - include photos, work samples, video clips.

(See sample Conference Forms handout)

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❑ Get input from families to include during the conference.

NOTE TO FAMILIES

Example One

Dear Family,

I am looking forward to our upcoming conference scheduled for Tuesday, October 3rd at 10:00am. I have listed some questions below that could give me valuable information about your child. Please think about your responses so we can discuss them at the conference.

1. What school activities does your child talk about at home?
2. What does your child enjoy?
3. What does your child dislike?
4. What are your child's interests?

See you at the conference!

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Example Two

Dear Family,

I am looking forward to our upcoming conference scheduled for Tuesday, October 3rd at 10:00am. I wanted to give you some idea about the questions you can expect to have answered during our conference.

1. How does my child react to guidance?
2. How does my child interact with his/her peers?
3. Is my child progressing developmentally at a level that is appropriate for him/her?

Please feel free to come with other questions or any concerns you may have. See you at the conference!

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Pre-conference TIP:



Allow families some choice when scheduling their conference time.

Be mindful of their situations and work schedules.

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DURING the conference

1. Create a safe and positive emotional climate!

Dr. Hymes ~

“To touch a child is to touch the parent. To praise the child is to praise the parent. To criticize the child is to hit at the parent. The two are two, but the two are one.”

Families' feelings (and egos) are tied to their children and their children's success.

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“When we choose to be parents, we accept another human being as part of ourselves, and a large part of our emotional selves will stay with that person as long as they live. From that time on, there will be another person on this earth whose orbit around us will affect us as surely as the moon affects the tides, and affect us in some ways more deeply than anyone else can. Our children are extensions of ourselves.”

~ Fred Rogers

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DURING the conference

2. Use positive communication techniques!

- Sandwich technique

Positive ~~ Hard to Hear ~~ Positive



- Talk only 50% of the time; listen the other 50%
- Use attentive behavior - lean forward, eye contact etc.

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DURING the conference

- Use the two-step process:
 1. Listen and reflect
 - Use reflective listening - “It sounds like you...”
 - Clarify to make sure you understand what the parent is *really* saying - “You are worried...”
 2. Choose an acceptable response
 - Use open responses that invite dialogue
 - Be specific and objective using concrete examples
 - Avoid using teacher jargon or acronyms

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Open vs. Closed Responses

Closed Response

PARENT: I’m concerned that Johnny can’t write his name.

TEACHER: He’ll be fine.

Open Response

PARENT: I’m concerned that Johnny can’t write his name.

TEACHER: You’re worried that Johnny is not writing his name?

What’s the difference?

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Be SOP -Specific, Objective, Positive

Avoid

- ❑ Negative words
 - Below average
 - Uncooperative
 - Mean
- ❑ Confrontation
 - “Your daughter has a problem.”
- ❑ Jargon/teacher talk
 - “We are working on SEL.”

Instead try

- ❑ Positive words
 - Working on his/her level
 - Working on listening skills
 - Working on getting along with friends
- ❑ Context of cooperation
 - “I need your suggestions for working with ____.”
- ❑ Explaining things and leaving out acronyms.
 - “We are working on social/emotional learning.”

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DURING the conference

3. Create a comfortable physical climate!

- ❑ Choose a private location
- ❑ Provide comfortable (or relatively comfortable) seating
- ❑ Arrange the furniture so that no barriers exist
- ❑ Invite appropriate participants/family members

Do you need to have two separate conferences for divorced/separated families?

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AFTER the conference

1. Document while it's fresh on your mind!

- ❑ Make any notes for yourself
- ❑ Who agreed to do what, for how long, and when?

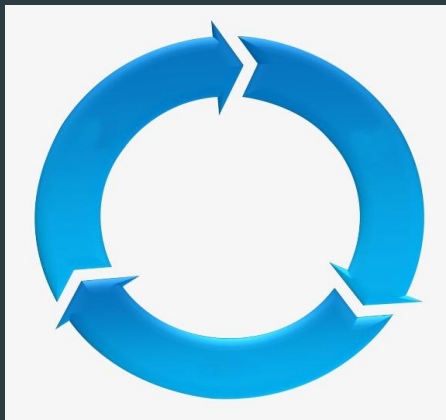
2. Do the necessary follow-up with families.

- ❑ Provide any promised information or resources
- ❑ Is another conference (or a phone call) necessary to touch base?

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AFTER the conference

- ### 3. Reflect on what went well! Consider how you might improve. Start all over again with preparation for the next conference!!



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Debriefing!
Questions?
Comments?