



# PEN Notes: Fact Sheet #2

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## Productive Parent-Teacher Conferences



From time to time, parents and teachers like to meet to discuss a child's progress in school, what parents can do to help their child perform at his/her best, and other issues of concern. These discussions often take place in the fall and the spring of the school year, but they can be scheduled at any time when the teachers or the parents feel the need to review how a child is doing.

Sometimes parent-teacher conferences are a source of concern for everyone involved—parents, teachers, and children. Parents may feel anxious about going to their child's classroom and listening to reports of their child's behavior and class work. Teachers—especially those in their first years of teaching—may be uncertain about how to

handle the conference and have it be worthwhile. Children may be uneasy about having their parents and teachers talk about them.

Report cards don't tell the whole story of how our children are doing academically. Parent-teacher conferences are scheduled to share things about our children and learn more about their strengths and weaknesses.

Remember: parents and teachers are not on opposite sides of the fence; we all want the same thing—children who succeed in learning. Parents really do want their children to be in good schools, and educators really do want to provide those schools.

### A Parent-Teacher Conference Check List:

#### Before


- If the assigned time is convenient, sign the conference sheet. If not, reschedule. Keep the appointment since everyone's time is important.
  - Talk with your child about his/her most and least favorite subject or any other concerns he/she might have.
  - Make a checklist of things to discuss with the teacher in the order of importance, and stick to the list.
- Share things you want the teacher to know about your child. Remember you are your child's first educator and you know your child best.
  - Is your child working to capacity, at or below grade level? Ask to see samples of his/her work.
  - Does your child participate in class?
  - Ask about the policies on homework, tests and quizzes as well as any long-term assignments.
  - Review your list and ask any questions you don't understand.

#### During

- Try to make a positive comment about the school or the classroom.
  - Ask if your child is adjusting and if he/she gets along with others.
  - Be a good listener and see what the teacher has to say.
  - Keep a positive attitude!
  - Tell the teacher of any special talents or interests your child has.
- Remember this is a process—you won't get everything discussed at one meeting. It's not the end of the world if you forget to ask a question or don't discuss all of the issues. If necessary, schedule an additional conference.
  - Be open to the information the teacher has about your child. Kids can be very different at school than they are at home.
  - Be sure to ask for specific suggestions on ways to help your child do well. This is an important part of the meeting. It can become your action plan.



## After

1. Make notes to help you remember what was discussed at the conference.
2. Start a folder about your child:  

  - a. test scores
  - b. report cards
  - c. health records
  - d. notes from the teacher
  - e. samples of work
3. Make a calendar:
  - a. mark the next conference
  - b. mark important events (concerts, programs, etc.)
  - c. mark all parent meetings and social events
  - d. mark due dates of class projects and reports
4. Write down the most important thing you learned from the conference! If possible, write a follow-up note to the teacher as a way of cementing the relationship.
5. Share the conference results with your child. Discuss any action plan you have agreed to with the teacher. Make sure your child knows that you and the teacher care about his/her progress and will work together to help your child succeed in school.
6. Stay in regular touch with the teacher to discuss the progress your child is making.

Meeting with your child's teachers should help build strong parent-teacher partnerships—partnerships that are needed if you and your child's teachers are to reach your common goal: helping your child get the best education possible.

Parent-teacher conferences are essential building blocks for home-school communication.

## Questions the Teacher May Have about Your Child:

1. How does your child feel about school?
2. Does your child have any health problems?
3. How does your child accept responsibility at home?
4. What does your child do with his/her time outside of school?
5. What are your child's interests and hobbies?
6. What types of books does your child read at home?

## Conferences Are...

- for listening, sharing and reinforcing the idea of team work.
- opportunities for teachers to explain criteria and grades used on report cards.
- successful when a teacher and school system create a climate that invites a partnership with parents.

Teachers need the help of parents to do the best job possible of educating every child. Parents provide important perspectives and information that can be extremely important and valuable to the teacher. The teacher can, in turn, help parents play an active role in education at home. Children are more likely to succeed in school if they can view their parents and teachers working together cooperatively.

