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PARENT/TEACHER INTERVIEWS

Helpful Hints

NT GOVERNMENT SCHOOL COUNCILS

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1. Parent/teacher interviews

Parent/teacher interviews can sometimes become a cause for concern for everyone involved. Children may be worried at the idea of parents and teachers talking about them. Regardless about how you feel it is important to remember that you both have a mutual interest—the welfare and education of your child.

Parent Teacher Interviews provide opportunities to:

- Share information about your child’s progress, interests and needs
- Foster positive and respectful relationships between home and school
- Improve communication with your child’s teacher
- Let the teacher know if you would like to become involved in classroom activities
- Schedule a follow-up interview if required

2. Before the interview

Both parents and teachers benefit from being well prepared in advance of the interview so that the interview is less emotionally charged and takes place in a trusting atmosphere.

- Make a list of any specific questions you want to ask your child's teacher
- Ask your child what he/she would like to ask or tell his/her teacher
- Ask your child what he/she thinks the teacher is going to tell you
- Think about any specific information or special things you will need to let the teacher know, e.g. any health issues or changes that have had an impact on your child
- Compare your child's current and previous reports
- If your child is to attend, it is important to prepare them for the interview by discussing your expectations of their role in the interview
- Attend with a partner or friend if you are nervous or unsure
- Take a pen and paper to take notes if required. Some teachers may take notes and provide a copy for you at the end of the interview

3. Punctuality

- Be on time and know where the interview is to be held
- If you have more than one teacher to see, ask not to have consecutive appointments too close together—in case someone is running late
- If you have to cancel your appointment, phone the school to let them know
- If there are unresolved issues or you wish to discuss your child's difficulties in great detail, consider asking for another interview. This is being respectful of the teacher's time and of those parents who are to follow

4. At the interview

Parent/teacher interviews involve the sharing of information about learning outcomes and collaboration through open communication.

- Begin on a positive note. Mention something that your child enjoys about the school or the particular class they are in
- Try to keep your body language positive
- Let the teacher know your child's interests, hobbies, strengths and areas where they may need extra encouragement
- Check on your child's social interactions at school as well as their academic progress
- If the teacher raises concerns, don't get angry or defensive. Remember that talking about concerns is the best way to make sure these are addressed and that your child has the support he/she needs to make improvements
- Listen and share ideas that may have worked for you at home. Be an active part of planning for ways to help make things better
- Confirm emergency contact numbers
- End the interview on a positive note, shaking hands with a thank you

5. When you get home from the interview

- Speak honestly with your child about the discussions you had with their teacher
- Let them know the positives and any problem areas that were discussed
- Discuss with your child any plans that you and their teacher have made to help make improvements
- Start right away on any plans for improvement and be consistent. This helps show your child that you consider them important and that everyone (parent, teacher and child) can work together to make positive changes
- If you have a partner or spouse who was unable to attend the interview, fill them in on the information as soon as possible
- If required, phone the teacher and organise a follow-up interview where you can check up on how things are going

6. Keep in touch during the year

- Keep in regular contact throughout the year with the teacher
- Telephone your child's teacher to make an appointment or schedule regular chats
- Read classroom notes, the school's newsletter and/or online information websites. Let the school know if you do not have access to a computer
- Get involved with working bees, parent help rosters and fundraising
- Become involved in your School Council or other parent group interviews. Meet other parents and school staff and discuss the future of education

7. Suggestions for questions to ask

1. Ask about your child's work habits, and learning style.
2. How does your child get along with others?
3. Is there anything you should know about your child's social/emotional progress?
4. Ask the teacher about the classroom rules and discipline, homework procedures and overall expectations for students.
5. Ask the teacher about student behaviour and how is it managed in class.
6. Ask the teacher what is the most important thing you can do at home to support your child's learning.
7. How can you make changes/progress with tutoring from home?
8. What level should your child be?
9. Is your child coping with the work load, level within the class?
10. Why are your child's grades down?
11. Will your child have to repeat the same grade?
12. What programs are available to assist home tutors/parents?
13. How and why changes in different teachers can impact on a child's progress?
14. What is the best way for parents to contact teachers if they are concerned and teachers to parents?
15. What is the teacher's expectation of your child?
16. Your expectations for your child are...
17. What are the children working on now in class?
18. What kind of library books will support what is going on at school right now? This year?
19. Does your child easily cooperate and follow the rules and routines during class time?
20. Ask the teacher to explain the A - E reporting, the different levels and how this affects your child.
21. Does your child join in with other children in the playground?
22. Who are your child's friends?

8. When there are no concerns

In some cases, parent/teacher interviews may not be very informative, especially if the teacher reports that the child has no problems.

Some parents may repeatedly hear that they “have nothing to worry about”. While this may sound reassuring, you may come away without the necessary information to help your child continue to make steady progress at school.

You may want to be prepared and ask some of the following questions.

1. What does my child do that surprises you?

Often this question can reveal what expectations the teacher has for your child. Sometimes a child behaves quite differently at school than at home.

2. What is my child reluctant to do?

This question can reveal more about your child’s interests and dislikes than parents would ordinarily know. The question may encourage the teacher to talk to the parent about your child’s academic and social preferences.

3. What is the goal you would like to see my child achieve?

This question can serve as a springboard for parents and teachers to develop a plan to work together to help your child set and reach specific outcomes. Even well behaved and high achieving children may benefit from setting goals in areas that need improvement or in which they might excel.

4. What can I do to support what is being done at school?

This question is always appreciated. Teachers may have suggestions for parents but may be afraid to offer unsolicited advice. This question helps create a team feeling.

References

Ann-Marie Clark; Parent-Teacher Conferences: Suggestions for Parents

Susan Witt; Parent/Teacher Interviews

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