



5 Helpful Tips for Upcoming Parent-Teacher Conferencing

1. Approach Parents with Positive Assumptions

Parents are your friends. They want to partner with you. They want to see their child succeed more than anything else. Parent conferences might be an opportunity for you to surface your beliefs about parents and reflect on them, but when you engage with parents, even if you hold some doubts about them, put those aside. Welcome every parent as your strongest ally in working with your student (their child).

2. Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

What is your goal or objective for the time you have with parents? What exactly do you want to communicate? What would you like the outcome of this meeting to be?

Here's an example: *My goal in Maria's conference is for her mom to see the growth she's made in writing this fall and to determine some ways that she can be more organized. I also want to hear her mom's perspective on the social challenges she's dealing with.*

Then prepare your materials. Have notes, tests, and work samples, but plan exactly what you want to share. Don't just sit down with parents and open a massive folder bursting with student work. Put Post-It notes on the items you want to share, select the best examples of the growth, and jot down a few notes.

3. Take the Opportunity to Learn

What could you ask parents that might help you better support your student? What would you like to know? If this is the first time you're sitting down with parents, it's a great opportunity to hear their perspective on their child's school experience so far, on what their child likes to do outside of school, on the questions and concerns they have about their child, and so on. So what do you want to ask?

4. Be Solution-Oriented

Be specific when asking for change. Telling a parent, "He's distracted a lot," is useless. What is the parent (who isn't sitting next to her child all day) supposed to do with that piece of information? How can she help her child or the teacher?

Whatever support you ask from a parent needs to be something that is within her sphere of influence. Asking a parent: "Can you talk to him about being more focused?" is possible, and parents can talk and talk, but the results might be limited. A teacher could say: "I'm concerned because your son is often distracted during independent work in my class. Here's what I'm doing to try to help him...Do you see this behavior at home ever? Do you have any other ideas for things I could try? Can you think of anything you might be able to do?" Always convey a growth mindset. All behaviors can change given the right conditions. If you want to see changes and have concerns about a student, be prepared to offer specific, actionable solutions.

5. Show that You Care

For parents, conferences can be terrifying or wonderful. As a parent, I have sat across from teachers whose feelings I couldn't identify -- I actually questioned whether or not they cared about my son as a human being and as a student. I have also sat across from teachers who I wanted to jump up and hug -- they so clearly cared about my boy.

Don't underestimate the power of the positive, and lead with it. Be specific in the positive data you share -- tell an anecdote or show a piece of work. Make sure you truly feel this positivity -- we can all sniff out empty praise. There is always, always something positive and praise-worthy about every single child. It's your job to find it and share that data with parents.

Taken from Elena Aguilar's article in [Edutopia](#) on 10/3/14. Elena is a Transformational Leadership Coach from Oakland, California.

