

Parent-Teacher Conferences

Clear communication increases opportunities for success

Report card conferences are around the corner and soon you will be meeting with your child's teacher. You might have even received a special note requesting a conference from the teacher.

Teachers are pros who gain from parental input.

While it is typical for parents to be a bit nervous when their children are struggling in school, they can relax more when they remember that teachers are professionals who benefit from the input of parents.

Teachers know that their job is to meet the needs of all children, and especially to pay attention to youth who struggle with learning or behaviour. So let go of any anxiety or guilt you may have about your son being a burden in the classroom. Remember that it is a teacher's job to respond to varying learning styles and needs.

Let's face it, children learn in differing ways.

Kids have their own individual personalities, and their own listening and work habits. To help students learn new knowledge and skills, teachers must know as much as they can about each child's learning preferences. No one knows more about these things than a parent. Teachers and parents have a powerful influence on how a boy learns and gets along with others. Working together, you both can help your son have a successful school year.

In my 25 years of working as an educator, I have noticed that meetings are derailed by frustration and defensiveness caused by unclear communication.



Use objective language – subjective terms confuse & confound communication

During the meeting be aware of the words you use to describe your son. Try to use neutral, factual language to describe behaviour and achievement rather than interpretive, subjective language. When parents and teachers use charged or subjective terms, the other party may get confused, defensive, even reactive.

A parent using a loaded word such as “lazy” to describe his son or a teacher saying “Your son is slow to pick up on new ideas” can mean different things to different people.

In the examples that follow notice how the subjective words can serve to wedge distance and create confusion between parents and teachers while objective words focus on what actually happened so that communication is clear and easily understood:

Subjective #1 “Tommy is so immature and disruptive.”

Objective #1 “Tommy gets out of his seat and walks around the classroom every 15 minutes.”

When school success is the only option parents & teachers focus on establishing positive solutions & constructive plans of action

Subjective #2 “Tyler is rude and uncooperative. I don’t know what to do with him.”

Objective #2 “When asked to complete the assignment in class, Tyler tells me in front of all the students, “You can’t make me do this,” and “this class is totally boring.”

Subjective #3 “Adam daydreams and seems scattered – he must be ADHD!”

Objective #3 “Adam stares out the window for periods of about 5 minutes until I quietly ask him how it’s going.”

Objective language describes in precise, neutral terms what your son does, when he does it, and how frequently he does it. Avoid becoming overwhelmed by subjective, judgmental labels that only invite defensive reactions.

Rather than giving the impression that a boy is incorrigible – or worse, unteachable – teachers anticipate success by describing circumstances in clear language that facilitates productive discussion and a focus on establishing positive solutions and constructive plans of action.

The BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils - the collective voice of parents for the best possible public education of all children in BC – has dozens of additional tips and suggestions for maintaining a focus on student success during parent-teacher interviews.

Visit their website for additional information - go to the **advocacy page** where you will find a meeting survival guide:

<http://www.bccpac.bc.ca>



Labels can transmit
negative expectations

When language is clear in a context of mutual respect, parents & teachers can discuss appropriate intervention and encouragement strategies.