

# HOW TO...

## Have Effective Parent Conferences



Parent communication is a very significant part of your job.

It's difficult or impossible to teach a child whose parents are not working with you as part of the team, so conferences provide crucial opportunities to update and strategize. Parent conference week is an exhausting time, but the following tips can help you immeasurably:

1. Don't take parents by surprise. Throughout the year, you should be sending out regular updates about class activities as well as individual progress reports. If a student is floundering, give some warning before report cards. And the conference should not be the first time the parents get a clue that their child is struggling. (By the way, it's also a nice idea to send out certificates of praise when a child does something special or commendable.)
2. Be incredibly well organized. I cannot emphasize this enough. Have all the grades, student portfolios, and other documentation right there. Don't be looking for stuff at the last minute. And speaking of documentation, I learned this the hard way: keep specific dates of and notes about incidents or concerns involving your students. It's very hard to reconstruct later, and it greatly enhances your credibility when you have these things in writing.
3. Use the student's own input as well. Prior to the conference, have each child complete a self-evaluation form. It is very interesting to see how kids think they are doing, where they feel they need help, and what they are most proud of. This helps give "bones" to the conference.



4. Remember, parents are not objective about their offspring. It's a plain fact. You need to be diplomatic and tactful. Offer no criticism without a constructive suggestion or proposed strategy. Make sure that you point out positives, not just problems.

It really backfires if you are too harsh, no matter how difficult a child may be.

5. You don't have to have all the answers. It's okay to ask parents if they have any suggestions or insights. You really need to enlist their support or you're fighting a lonely and losing battle.