



Parent Conference



Definition

Parents must be notified of student difficulties and attempts made to involve them in problem resolution. A parent conference is also an excellent opportunity to discuss a child's success. Parents may be involved via on-going phone calls and/or school visits.

Things to Do

- ✓ Make introductions.
- ✓ Identify the reason for the conference.
- ✓ Offer solutions.
- ✓ Ask for parent input.
- ✓ Agree upon a plan.
- ✓ Follow up.

✓ Make introductions.

Greet the parents and identify yourself and your relationship to their child. Introduce any other individuals that may be involved in the conference. Try and make the parents feel relaxed and not threatened.

✓ Identify the reason for the conference.

Share information about the problem or student difficulty that prompted the conference. **Use precise, clear language, avoiding educational jargon.**

✓ Offer solutions.

Offer ideas or possible solutions to the problem.

✓ Ask for parent input.

Ask for feedback, alternatives, or negotiated solutions. Elicit parents' ideas and support and make them feel "part of the team."

**Let Parents Share Opinions
and Feelings**

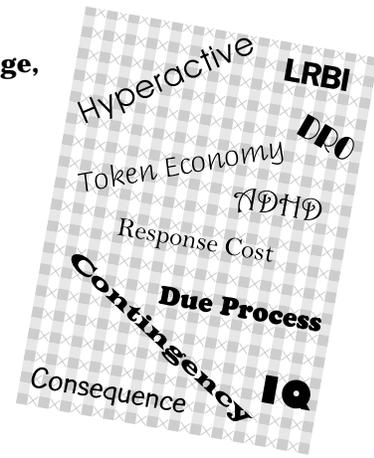
Give parents a chance to share opinions and feelings, even if they are in opposition to your preferred solution. Use good listening skills. You may want to use reflective listening and try and get at the real problem. Be sympathetic or empathetic to help validate the parents' concerns or experiences.

✓ Agree upon a plan.

You may need to supply further information, schedule further conferences, or be willing to negotiate and compromise to achieve this step. However, it is best to have the parents as part of the team rather than as adversaries.

REVIEW

Once the team has agreed upon a solution, review it. Make sure assignments are specifically spelled out and understood by the person carrying out the assignment. Set due dates if appropriate.



✓ Follow up.

Follow up in a reasonable amount of time. Check on assignment, how things are progressing, or if there are further problems. Share successes and discuss things that need to be changed. Set further conferences if needed.

Variations of the Technique

👉 IEP Meetings.

These meetings are used to generate the student's educational program. Good parent interaction skills are needed to facilitate this process. Use clear information sharing, good listening skills, and diplomatic negotiation skills to accomplish a successful teaming experience.

👉 Unexpected visit/phone call.



When a parent initiates a complaint, the most important skill needed in this situation is listening. Do not act defensively; that can shut

down listening skills and escalate conflict. Listen closely to what the parent says, realizing that their perceptions are their "realities," even if they are different than yours. Ask yourself what is the ultimate goal in defusing the situation and how you and the parent can accomplish that goal in a win/win manner.

👉 Sharing positive information or progress.

This can be a good way of involving parents. Frequent sharing of positive information helps build a relationship between home and school and smooths the way for teamwork if problems arise. This can be done through short notes or quick phone calls as well as face-to-face conferences.

Potential Problems and Solutions

Parents May Ask for Solutions That Cannot Be Realistically Implemented

Before responding to the parents' request, ask yourself, "Is it really impossible to do this, or am I merely responding to a 'that's not the way we do it' mind set?" Be responsive to the parents' request, and if you can, try to negotiate a compromise. While it may at times be necessary to say "absolutely not," realize that doing such can hurt the working relationship between parents and school. Compromise should be tried first so that both parties feel that they have gained something. "Absolutely not" should be the last choice in dealing with the parents' request.

You Come to an Impasse in Negotiations

If you come to an impasse in negotiations, it may be necessary to terminate the conference, let the dust settle, and reconvene at a later time. It may help to invite additional individuals (i.e., building administrator, district administrator, school psychologist, expert in a particular field, etc.) to the next conference that may have more authority to make “the big decisions” or to have more information on a particular subject.

Getting Ready

☞ Make sure that you have all the facts or information pertaining to the problem so that you can accurately share that information. If the problem is a behavioral incident, make sure you talk to all people who were involved so that you get everyone’s perception of what really happened.



☞ Decide who needs to be involved in the conference and invite all necessary team members. **CAUTION:** Remember that large numbers of professionals involved in a conference may intimidate or threaten the parents and could impede the process of finding solutions.

☞ Identify the reason or incident that necessitates a conference with the parents.

☞ If program changes are going to be discussed for a student in special education, provide parents with written prior notice of the proposed changes prior to the meeting. Don’t forget to include the time, location, and names of individuals who will be attending the conference in the invitation.

☞ Decide if the conference is best handled through a note, a telephone call, or a face-to-face meeting. Arrange a convenient time for all involved. Schedule an appropriate amount of time to adequately discuss the concern and so that you are not rushed by time constraints.

Before Contacting Parents:

- A. Gather facts
- B. Identify reason
- C. Select method

Face-to-Face Conference:

Written Invitation
&
Prior Notice

Materials and Supplies

- ☞ Have the telephone number of the parents available. Prepare materials that you may want to share with the parents.
- ☞ Take along any notes, data sheets, or work samples that are needed to refresh your memory or visually show the concern.
- ☞ Bring paper and pencil to take notes and write down agreed-upon solutions, individual roles, and projected deadlines for assignment.



References

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Simpson, R. L. (1982). *Conferencing parents of exceptional children*. Rockville, MD: Aspen.

Turnbull, A. P., & Turnbull, H. R. (1990). *Families, professionals, and exceptionality: A special partnership* (2nd ed.). Columbus, OH: Merrill.