

Havel, A. & Budd, J. (2015). The collaborative parent-teacher interview. Perspectives! The Official Newsletter of the Montreal Centre for Learning Disabilities. Friday, January 16, 2015. Email to the Montreal Centre for Learning Disabilities [newsletter@ldmontreal.ca].

The Collaborative Parent-Teacher Interview



by

Alice Havel: Student AccessAbility Centre, Dawson College Research Team Member, Adaptech Research Network

&

Jillian Budd: Research Assistant & Project Manager - Free or Inexpensive Technology Database, Adaptech Research Network

Parent-teacher interviews can be daunting, especially if we weren't the most enthusiastic students ourselves. It's not much better if our memories of past interviews about our children are the litanies of their shortcomings as a student. However, regardless of our past experiences, it is important to remember that, in fact, you and the teacher are on the same team.

As a parent you want only the best for your child. The teacher's role is to help students achieve their potential in all aspects of school. Thus, the goal of the parent-teacher interview should be to build a respectful, ongoing relationship that allows you both to share information and to develop strategies to help your child learn.

Your expertise is that you know your child best, but the teacher is familiar with what is happening in school and has professional expertise and skills. So before going into the interview, do some preparation and go in with a positive and open attitude!

Here are some tips/strategies to help you achieve this before, during, and after the interview.

Before the interview:

1) Select an interview time that is convenient for you and the teacher. If you need to meet with several teachers on one evening, don't schedule consecutive times in case you get delayed.

2) Find out who is requested to attend. Often students are invited to be present to show their portfolio of work (student-led conference) but this is not always the practice.

3) It is recommended that when possible both parents attend.

4) If you feel it's necessary, arrange to bring along a friend or an advocate BUT make sure you inform the school ahead of time and explain why you believe this would be helpful.

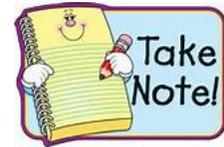
5) Discuss the interview with your child ahead of time. Does your child have any concerns?

6) Prepare for the meeting but keep in mind that usually 10 to 15 minutes are allotted for each interview.

7) Make note of any factors that might be helpful for the teacher to know.

8) Prepare a list of questions. Possible questions could include:

- What are my child's academic strengths?
- What are my child's personal strengths?
- What does my child find challenging?
- What is my child's attitude towards school?
- How much homework should my child be doing every night?
- What can I do at home to help my child with schoolwork?
- What can you tell me about my child's behaviour in the classroom?
- How is my child getting along with others in and out of class?
- Is there anything about my child's needs that I should be aware of?
- What support services are available for my child at this school?



9) Identify a maximum of 2 or 3 concerns to deal with during the interview.

During the interview:

- 1) Arrive on time.
- 2) Introduce yourself and your relationship to the child.
- 3) Introduce anyone who has accompanied you and explain their role.
- 4) Begin on a positive note (e.g. John really enjoyed the class outing last week).
- 5) Allow the teacher to begin and actively listen to what is being said.
- 6) Jot down notes if you can listen and write at the same time; otherwise do it right after the interview.
- 7) Ask the questions you have prepared if they haven't already been answered.
- 8) Focus on the present unless you are referring to strategies that have proven effective in the past.
- 9) Remember that you can't change everything at once; the interview is only one step in the process.
- 10) Discuss any strategies that the teacher and you have in mind that could be helpful.
- 11) Leave the interview with a clear plan.
- 12) Ask the teacher for the best way to maintain communication.
- 13) Respect the time constraints. If necessary, you can always request another interview at a later date.

After the interview:

- 1) Send the teacher a brief note, thanking them for their collaboration.
- 2) Discuss the interview with your child.

- 3) Talk to your child about their strengths and ask them where they feel they can improve.
- 4) Develop a plan with your child, as they need to take an active role in their own learning.
- 5) Follow up on the teacher's recommendations. Give the teacher feedback on the actions you've taken.
- 6) Maintain regular communication with the teacher.
- 7) If you feel it is necessary to meet again, before the next parent-teacher interviews, ask to schedule another appointment.
- 8) If you've talked with the teacher and made a sincere effort to collaborate but are still not satisfied with the outcome, ask to consult with others in the school (i.e. principal, resource teacher, school psychologist).



Although a lot of suggestions have been presented, it would be very difficult for a parent (or a teacher) to put them all into practice at the next parent-teacher interview. How we engage in the interview is a reflection of our personality and our experiences. However you might select several suggestions that catch your attention and put them into practice. But please remember: You and the teacher are on the same team. Be positive, focus on the present, and acknowledge that any positive change for your child begins with small steps.