

## Family/child conferences: Connecting with families (Part 2)

The following is part 2 of a two part series on family/child conferences. Part 1 can be found online at [bit.ly/24R2uCe](https://bit.ly/24R2uCe).

Family/child conferences are a time to connect with families to discuss children's overall progress and well-being. As one teacher shared, "Conferences are a time to sit down together with families and talk, hope and plan strategies that will foster growth. And it allows time to celebrate how truly special the child is!"

### Connecting to development and learning

Each program, teacher, child, and family help to shape what the conference should include. Although many programs and teachers already have their conferencing practices in place, it is a good idea to consider any new ideas that may make conferences a positive, meaningful experience for all involved. Before planning the conference take time to think about what has worked well in past family/child conferences and what changes you might want to make to the set-up. Use the planning list included in this tip sheet to help you plan.

### Creating conferences that make the connection

#### Planning for participation

Observations, assessments, goals, and plans for the child's overall growth, development, and success are topics that may be included in the agenda. It helps to have written notes and a plan of what to say. Have all of your information, assessments (checklists, formal and informal observations, anecdotal records, etc.) and work samples available to refer to.



#### Starting the conference

Greet families with a welcoming smile, clear eye contact, and a handshake, but most importantly, let them know you are happy that they are here! Start conferences by connecting to a child's accomplishments, but also remember that all children face challenges— it's a natural path in growing and developing. It's how adults deal with these challenges that matter. Conferences are not about telling parents what their child's imperfections are, but rather about highlighting their child's strengths and setting goals to work on together to help children succeed and embrace the joy of learning.

#### During the conference

While conferencing, encourage collaborative planning and developmental discussion. In doing so, both the family and the teacher can reveal ideas that support the child's learning process. For example, a toddler teacher shared how one child liked to "write" scribbled lists on note pads, talking about his dad's grocery shopping lists. She shared with the parent(s) that the child was not only playing but was also displaying early literacy and writing skills and making connections to his father's written grocery shopping lists. The teacher suggested providing note pads at home and grocery fliers to look through together and to encourage the child to continue make shopping lists.



The father shared how he has noticed his son identifying letters in his shopping lists. Making this connection adds a developmental focus for both parent(s) and teacher to continue.

If the conference is a child-led conference, have the child choose a few work samples ahead of

time (with your help) to share with their family. Encourage the child to tell what they liked about their work and how they went about the process. The child also may want to show materials or areas that they enjoy playing/working in. Child-led conferences are easier to set up with school-age children than with preschool children, but it can be a good practice to start with preschool children, particularly if their future school embraces child-led conferences. You might offer half the conference time with the child leading and the other half with the parents and teacher exchanging ideas. If children are present at the conference, adults must be fully aware that the child can hear everything—even if playing in another area of the room.

### Ending the conference

It's helpful to use "Success Plans" (or conference notes) which are notes/plans written during the conference process that provide documentation for the ideas discussed and future plans for follow-up. It's important to be specific: write the idea, what each person plans to do as a result of the idea, and for how long. Also include a time for future discussion, such as a follow up phone conversation. Both the family and teacher should have copies.

Setting a welcoming tone, including intentional dialog, linking classroom examples with developmental skills, and setting goals in family/child conferences can create the opportunity to cultivate conversations, connections, and bring everyone—children, families, teachers, programs—together in the learning process!

### References:

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education.  
<http://www.ncpie.org/>

Schulting, Amy. "Promoting Parent–School Relationships during the Transition to Kindergarten." Harvard Family Research Project.

## Planning List

### Take a moment to think about:

- ▶ What works well with your existing parent/child conferences?
- ▶ What are some changes you have considered making to your conference practices?
- ▶ What child information do you discuss regularly with families?
- ▶ Are there family requests for the conference?
- ▶ Will the child be participating in the conference?
- ▶ Are there special family circumstances to consider?

### Build on what you know:

Once you have reflected on past conferences, family needs, and what the family already knows about their child's progress, you can use this information to:

- Decide on your conference topics.
- Plan the conference agenda and time frame.
- Choose child work samples and resource materials to share with families.
- Develop tentative learning goals for the child.
- Think about how to present information to families.