

One Page Resource: *Family Conferences*

Purpose:

Family Conferences are about connecting and partnering with families for student success. They are an opportunity for two-way communication. Educators can dialogue with families to celebrate the growth, accomplishments, and successes that a child has made within the classroom and the home. Family conferences also allow an educator an opportunity to reflect with families on this growth in order to establish future individualized developmentally appropriate goals that further support the development of the child.

What can be discussed during the Family Conference

- How a child likes to learn.
- What the child says about school/class at home.
- How the child enjoys spending free time at home and in school.
- What progress the child has achieved in relation to milestones.
- Developmental screenings, work samples, documentation and portfolios.

First Steps: Schedule Time with Families

Offer flexibility with scheduling. Include multiple times throughout a week or day. Invite all important family figures in the child's life, though only one family member might attend or another might need to attend a different time/day.

Alternative Scheduling Options

Transportation and timing can be difficult. Consider alternative options to accommodate families that cannot make times provided on-site. For example, use technology:

- Phone Conference
- Use video conferencing apps (for example, Skype in the classroom is free).

Document times and dates that families have selected for conferences. Consider including:

- A list with time/date, educator, child's name, and family member(s) name that will be attending the conference.
- Provide further reminders to families letting them know the time, date, and place for conferences as the date approaches (with sticky notes, individualized text messages, child-made invitations, etc.).

Technology

Technology can be used to help organize the time/dates of conferences. Consider:

- Apps that help you send mass reminders
- Apps that help you manage sign-up sheets

Before the Conference

Create a Welcoming Environment

- Provide adult-size chairs.
- Sit side-by-side, not across from each other. Arranging furniture in a friendly and non-threatening way expresses a desire to partner with families and can defuse tension.
- (Optional) Snacks and water are always appreciated by families and children.

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During the Conference

Topics to Discuss During the Conference

- Classroom observations to include portfolio documentation, quick looks (if applicable), pictures of child, samples of child's work, or any other pertinent data.
- Developmental screenings (e.g., ASQ-3, ASQ-SE).

Tips for Welcoming Families During the Conference

- Be professional.
- Focus on what the child can do, their interests and strengths.
- Encourage and welcome family feedback and ideas, this can offer an opportunity to collectively set developmentally-appropriate goals.
- Offer time for families to ask questions.
- Use familiar language with families, rather than educational jargon.
- Children do better in school when their families are involved. Involve families and provide suggestions for further supporting the development of their child at home.
- Keep in mind that involvement may look different for every family.

After the Conference

Take a moment to reflect about information shared by families, and how it can help support the development of the child and used with lesson planning.

Tips for Partnering with Families

- Share at the time of enrollment, during home visits, or at an open house, how conferences will be conducted during the year.
- Explain that conferences are for celebrating children's skills and accomplishments. Avoid waiting until conferences to share concerns or issues with families.
- Emphasize the positive.
- Let families talk first and use active listening skills.
- Discuss how both parties want what's best.
- Agree upon strategies to be used at home and school.
- Ask for preferred contact method for the rest of the year (e.g., e-mail, text).
- Consider asking families how they would like to be involved. Be sure to explore a variety of on-site and off-site opportunities, as well as opportunities to participate outside of the working day.

Adapted from: Koralek, D. G., & Christian, L. (2007). Understanding Families: Partnerships for Learning: Conferencing with families. In Spotlight on Young Children and Families (pp. 12-15). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

