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As with teaching, planning is critical to an effective conference. Here are some important steps to include:

1. Prepare a send-home that invites parents to meet with you, states the purpose of the conference, and lists potential times, including both afternoon and evening slots. Have parents call or send a note to reserve a time slot.
Note: When divorced parents share custody, don't forget to invite both.
2. Decide upon the goals for the conference (one or two will do).
3. Prepare an agenda that you share with parents before

the conference. Include such topics as your general impression of the child, his or her progress in each academic area, standardized test scores, your goals for the child in each content area, and strategies you will use to meet goals.

4. Plan (and write down) questions to ask, points to make, and suggestions to offer.
5. Ask parents to bring to the conference a list of their child's strengths and weaknesses as they perceive them. (Include *Sample Parent Conference Form* for this purpose)
6. Fill out the *Sample Teacher Form* (or one like it) listing the child's strengths and weaknesses and proposing action to be taken.
7. Collect samples of student work to display.
8. Prepare to explain your goals and teaching strategies.
9. Schedule enough time for questions and discussion.
10. Pull together necessary materials such as a daily schedule of classroom activities, a checklist of skill areas and notes on student progress, sample work, test scores, and reports from other teachers where appropriate.

Arranging the Setting

Try making the conference area as comfortable as possible. Experienced teachers report that such amenities as adult-sized chairs, soft, relaxing music, and refreshments put parents at ease. Also, try to greet parents at the door and sit with them at a table or in chairs facing each other. (Never put the teacher's desk between yourself and parents.) If you provide paper and pens, parents can take notes to follow up on at home. And make sure you have a few activities for the younger siblings who invariably tag along.

Many teachers find it helpful to hang a "Conference in Progress" sign on the door to prevent interruptions. Further, many suggest setting a table of materials that parents can take home for example, information on homework and grading policies, newsletters, suggestions for how to help children at home and at school, and invitations to school activities or parent group meetings.

Conducting the Conference

First off, briefly review the agenda you prepared in advance. Then, communicate the specific information you have gathered about the child. Listen carefully to parents' responses, answer their questions, explain each point, and ask them if they can confirm your impressions. Set goals together for the child's future progress.

When you are delivering news about an academic or behavioral problem, author Susan Swap and other suggest certain strategies.

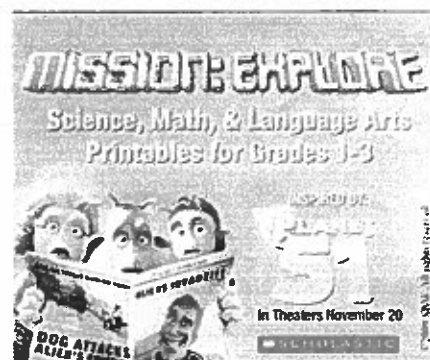
- Focus your comments and efforts only on things that can be changed.

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- Limit the number of suggestions for improvements so that parents are not overwhelmed.
- Speak plainly and avoid jargon and euphemistic language.
- Be tactful, but not so tactful that you don't adequately communicate the problem.
- Ask for and listen to parents' reactions.

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Policies & Practices: Parent-Teacher Conferences

Kneas discusses how to make parent-teacher conferences a valuable experience for both new teachers and kids' families. Thoughtful planning, effective training and good follow-up efforts are recommended to first year teachers.

Important Beginnings for Beginners

Student teachers, new teachers, or those who are simply new to a school, need get to know their colleagues. First year teachers, find out exactly who and what to familiarize yourself with before school starts.

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