

# PARENT/TEACHERS INTERVIEWS



Here are eight strategies for advocating for your child in school.

## 1. Recognize what it means to advocate

You may believe that in order to advocate for your child, you must be confident and knowledgeable. However, "advocating" just implies speaking up about the issues at hand.

You can also express yourself in a style that is comfortable for you. You don't have to be loud or speak in front of a large crowd. You can advocate quietly and with a single individual, such as your child's teacher.

## 2. Understand that it is acceptable to speak up

You may not consider it your responsibility to be involved in your child's education. It may even appear to be going too far. However, if you are concerned, you should speak out. It is not impolite to express your worries. Teachers want their students to succeed. They understand that families have a wealth of knowledge to contribute.

## 3. Make a list of your ideas

It is beneficial to write down what you intend to discuss. If you need assistance, you can use this parent-teacher conference worksheet to organize your thoughts and outline what you want to discuss.

Some people think more clearly when they speak. If this describes you, consider capturing your thoughts on a smartphone. Alternatively, speak with a friend or family member who can take notes. Knowing what you want to say ahead of time can help make the conversation go more smoothly.

## 4. Begin by talking to someone you trust



Start the topic with your child's teacher if you have a good relationship with them. Send an email, a message, a text, or make a phone call to find out when the best time to talk is.

If talking to the teacher makes you uncomfortable, find someone else you trust to help you think through your options. This could be an administrator, a professional or a librarian. You can also talk to another parent who has gone through a similar experience. Remember that other parents may have had an emotional or traumatic experience as well.

Remember that speaking up with someone you trust is preferable to not speaking up at all. It will also make you feel more confidence when speaking with the teacher or other school personnel.

## 5. Ask as many questions as necessary

You can begin by inquiring about what is going on at school. Inquire about what children this age are learning and whether your child is learning as quickly as other children.

If you have specific concerns, ask about them. For example, you could say, "My child appears to be struggling with math." He tears and says he's stupid if he has math homework. Is that common?" You may also state, "I'm concerned that my child's reading takes too long and that she doesn't recognize simple words." Do you see it as well?"

## 6. Don't be afraid to express your emotions — but do so in a respectful manner

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## 7. Inquire about more assistance for your child

Learn what to do if your child is falling behind in school. Don't be scared to inquire about available assistance. You can also request a free school evaluation to have a better understanding of your child's abilities and requirements. The results will be used to determine what kind of support and assistance your child requires at school.

Any requests should be made in writing. Make copies of these and keep a communication diary to detail who you spoke with and when.

## 8. Continue to speak up

Advocating for your child is a continuous process. You'll most likely have to keep doing it. It's a good idea to figure out how frequently you should contact your child's teacher. PPO meetings, for example, can provide insight into what's going on in the school and can help you learn about additional resources that may benefit your child.



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## Questions to ask at Your Parent-Teacher Meetings

Knowing you have to attend parent-teacher meetings may make you apprehensive, intimidated, or upset. You may be unsure of what to anticipate or what is expected of you. Making a list of questions ahead of time can allow you to have a constructive conversation with your child's teachers. The list of questions should be made in order of importance in case you run out of time at the meeting.

Here are some examples of questions that will help you learn more about how your child is doing in school:

1. What should my child be able to do this year?
  2. How will he or she be evaluated on this?
  3. What subjects does my child do best and worst in?
  4. What do these strengths and weaknesses look like?
- How are my child's skills compared to his peers?
  - Does my child seem to be having fun at school?
  - Have you noticed anything out of the ordinary?
  - Does my child turn in their homework on time?
  - What kinds of tests and evaluations will my child have to take this year?
  - How good is my child at taking tests?
  - Does my child seem to have any test-related anxiety?
  - Does my child take part in class activities and discussions?
  - Has my child missed any classes besides the ones for which they were excused?
  - Do you think my child is living up to what he or she could be?
  - What can I do at home to help my kid do better in school?

If your child gets special services like gifted programs, special education, English classes, speech or occupational therapy, or help for a learning disability, you can ask how often these services happen and how your child is doing with them.

If you don't understand something, ask someone to explain it to you.

Pay close attention to what the teacher has to say. Don't be afraid to ask for more information if you don't understand something the teacher says, like an educational term or an explanation of a school rule. It's important for you to understand what your child's teacher is telling you.

Again, start the meeting by asking the most important questions because you may run out of time, especially if other parents are waiting to talk to the teacher after you. You can always meet with the teacher again to talk about anything you didn't get the chance to ask during this meeting.



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## Tips for Successful Parent-Teacher Meeting at Your Child's School

### Before the meeting

If you do some work ahead of time, the meeting with your child's teacher will go better and be more useful.

- **Talk to your child**

To get ready for the meeting: Talk to your child about it. Ask your child what subjects he or she is best at and what subjects he or she doesn't like as much. Ask your child if there is anything in particular he or she would like you to talk to the teacher about. Make sure your child knows that you and the teacher are getting together to help him so he won't worry about the meeting.

- **Make a list of your notes**

Make a list of things you want to talk to the teacher about and things you think the teacher should know, including your worries about the school, your child's home life, any big changes in your family, habits, hobbies, part-time jobs, religious holidays, or anything that is bothering your child. Make sure to ask your partner or other adults who help you care for your child what they think.

- **Prepare a list of questions**

Having a good conversation with your child's teacher will be easier if you come up with a list of questions ahead of time. Set the questions in order of importance in case you run out of time at the meeting.

### During the Parent teacher meeting

- **Be on time**

Start the meeting off right by showing up on time. Keep in mind that other parents may also have meetings that day and if you're late, you may miss yours altogether. You should also plan to end the meeting at the scheduled time so that other parents can start theirs on time.

- **Be yourself**

Unwind and just be yourself. Remember that both you and your child's teacher want the best for your child and you are in this together.

- **Stay calm**

Keep your cool during the meeting. The best way to work with your child's teacher is to talk to them in a respectful way. If people get angry or upset during the meeting, it will be hard to communicate effectively.

- **Ask for help if you don't understand something**

Pay close attention to what the teacher has to say. Don't be afraid to ask for more information if you don't understand something the teacher says, like an educational term or an explanation of a school rule.

- **Start the meeting by asking the most important questions first**

Ask the most important questions first because you may run out of time, especially if other parents are waiting to talk to the teacher after you. You can always meet with the teacher again to talk about anything you didn't get to during the meeting.

- **Discuss differences of opinion with respect**

If you don't agree with the teacher, explain why you don't in a polite way. If you don't tell the teacher that you don't agree, the teacher might think you do and move on to the next topic. If you and the teacher talk about your differences, you might both find a better way to help your child

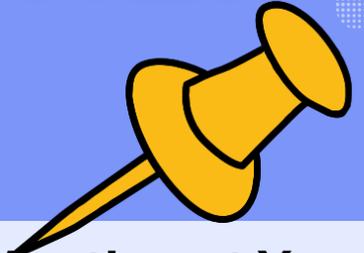
### Make a plan of what to do

Ask your child's teacher for specific ideas on how you can help your child at home with homework, reading, organization, routines, behavioral issues, etc. Make sure you understand what the teacher is telling you and, if you don't, ask for more information. The action plan will be made up of this list of ideas. Set up a way to keep track of your child's progress and the best way to communicate with his or her teacher, such as through phone calls, emails, notes, or meetings. At the end of the meeting, go over the action plan with the teacher to make sure you both have the same goals.

### Thank the teacher for giving you a chance to talk

Thank the teacher for giving your child their time and support, as well as for anything she has done to help your child.

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#### **After the meeting has ended**

Speak with your child about the meeting. Focus on the good things and be honest about the problems that were brought up. If you and the teacher made a plan, tell your child what it is. Make sure your child knows that this plan was made by you and the teacher to help him and be sure to set expectations with your child about fulfilling the action plan.

#### **Start implementing the plan of action**

Start working on the plan. Check your child's behaviour and schoolwork often to make sure that it's working. Ask your child how he feels about school and his work.

#### **Communicate with the teacher**

Keep in touch with your child's teachers. This will help you and the child's teachers work better together, which is an important part of the child's school success. When a child sees that his or her parents and teachers are working together, the child will know that his or her education is a top priority at school and at home.

