

VCS Insights

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Teacher Conferences

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Spiritual Dimensions

Teacher conferences can be fearful and frustrating, or they can be fun and fulfilling. With careful planning, practice and prayer teacher conferences can be a rewarding event.

There are two key spiritual dimensions that will help facilitate successful conferences-servanthood and reconciliation. Philippians 2:3-4 say, "*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*" It is not a question of parent vs. teacher. Rather, it is the parent and the teacher working together to provide the best possible education for the child. After all, if it were not for the student, there would be no need for a teacher. Thus, the focus is on what is best for the child. The question is not, "who is right". The question is "what is the right thing to do for the child?".

The second key concept is reconciliation. Second Corinthians 5:18-19 say "*And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.*"

During your conference, you may be faced with parents who are cynical and distrustful, those who are activists, stressed out, guilty, angry, troubled, demanding, critical, and just plain hard to get along with. Regardless of how they may be when they come to your conference, through the ministry of reconciliation they will be feeling better about their child, themselves, and you as the teacher. Believe God for a special anointing just for parent conferences.

Preplanning

A parent-teacher conference can be organized into three components-preplanning, conference, and post conference.

The following activities should be incorporated in the preplanning component.

1. **Environment.** Create a comfortable and private physical environment away from your desk. Make certain that your room is clean and neat. Include adult size furniture, and a place where parents can take notes. Provide an area large enough to spread the student's work out so parents can examine it.
2. **Worksheets.** Prepare a conference work sheet that can be given to the parent. Include a summary of the items you intend to share with the parent.
3. **Folders.** Prepare a folder with samples of the student's work. This should contain work exhibits from the beginning of the grading period. Don't confuse the parent by trying to show every piece of work the student has done in the past months. What you don't show in the conference, the parents can look over at home. Come to each conference with your grade book.
4. **Materials.** If you plan to ask parents to work with their child on a particular skill or subject area, have appropriate materials available for them to take home.
5. **Questions.** Know exactly what you will say and what questions you will ask. Be prepared to cite specific examples when expressing concern about the student's work or behavior. Try to anticipate parental reaction so you can be prepared to respond calmly and appropriately.

The Conference

1. **Welcome.** Greet each parent at the door and thank them for coming. Smile. Start with Prayer.
2. **Rapport.** Establish rapport by sharing a positive thought about the student or by inquiring about an activity the student takes part in outside school, e.g., sports, church, pets, etc
3. **Strengths.** Mention the student's strengths first. Where possible, provide specific examples.
4. **Progress.** Briefly discuss the student's progress in

each subject area and show exhibits of the student's work. Don't show the parents only the best or poorest work. Show the whole range. If possible, show how work has improved or changed overtime. Don't focus just on grades; identify specific objectives and the standards of acceptable performance.

5. **Behavior.** Briefly discuss the student's behavior, work habits, social skills, fruit of the Spirit. Make comparisons with the standard, not other students.

6. **Concerns.** Ask if the parent has any concerns. Invite parents to share their thoughts and suggestions about the student. Be a good listener and be open to receive from the parents. Hear with your ears and listen with your heart. Stick to issues at hand and avoid getting sidetracked or off on some tangent. Be grateful for insights into the child's behavior. Thank the parent for insights.

7. **Goals.** Establish two or three immediate goals for the student and work with the parents to create a plan for meeting those goals. Provide any materials parents might need to implement the plan.

8. **Follow-up.** Arrange for a follow-up phone call or meeting and let the parents know how they can reach you if they have questions. Inform the parent of the homework hotline.

9. **Summarize.** Review the highlights of the conference and end on a positive note. Be optimistic, for example, "I'm so glad that you suggested helping Suzanne to make the multiplication cards for home. I'm sure they will help her with her arithmetic." As a signal that the conference is over, you might suggest another meeting time.

10. **Thank You.** Conclude in prayer. Walk the parents to the door and thank them for coming.

Post-conference

The success of your conference is not necessarily measured by what happened during the conference, but by the level of communication that takes place following the conference.

1. **Information.** Keeping information flowing from school to home and back again makes for happy parents.

2. **Calendars.** If a follow-up conference has been scheduled, enter it on your calendar.

3. **Follow up.** Make follow-up phone calls no later than one week after the conference to see if the parent needs any assistance or has any further questions. Follow through on any promises or commitments made during the conference.

Conference Success Strategies

Your success can be enhanced by keeping in mind the following proven conference strategies.

1. **Complaints.** Do not complain to parents about problems in the class, shortcomings, lack, etc.

2. **Confidentiality.** Be sure to discuss just the student and not any other student. Deal with the situation individually and in confidence. Similarly, don't let comments about other children enter the conversation. Don't talk about other brothers and sisters you may have had in your class.

3. **Understanding.** Seek understanding, hear criticism fully, and get suggestions. Avoid arguments. When it is desirable to change a point of view, do it diplomatically.

4. **Acceptance.** If a parent tells you why he thinks his child is acting a certain way, accept it and lead the conversation onto other possible causes. The student may be acting that way for a number of reasons.

5. **Commitment.** If a parent suggests a plan of action, accept it if at all possible. Don't commit to anything you cannot deliver on.

6. **Attitude.** Don't assume that parents will accept your help. If you give them the impression that you think they need help, your attitude may be taken for criticism or condemnation.

7. **Suggestions.** If you have no suggestions for improving a trait, don't bring it up. Don't suggest things that are really the responsibility of the school. Don't send the parent away loaded down with countless suggestions, concentrate on one or two things on which you can work together to help the child.

8. **Body Language.** Be on your guard for your own facial expressions. A wince or slight frown following a parent's comment may embarrass him. Especially avoid surprise or disapproval.

Expectation: As I acknowledge the Lord in my conferences, He will direct my conversation (Proverbs 3:6).