

# Five Mistakes to Avoid at Parent/Teacher Conferences

Parent-teacher conferences are important tools for keeping our children on-track educationally, resolving conflict and building relationships. But more than a few of these meetings jump the tracks and end up unproductive or worse. Here are some of the common mistakes we parents make that can torpedo our conference and ultimately short-change our kids.

**1. Talking about other children or their performance.** Your child's teacher is legally bound to protect the confidentiality of students. So bringing up or asking the teacher to discuss another child's grades or compare him to your child is out of line. The only time other children should be a legitimate issue is in cases of bullying, etc.

**2. Going in with your "Mama Bear" instincts on.** We parents can be very protective of our children at times, and it can make us look and act a little, um, crazy. Remind yourself before you go into a conference that even if there is a problem, it's probably the result of a misunderstanding. Realize that your child's teacher is on your team, and wants to see your child succeed.

**3. Assuming that your child gave you all the facts.** We're not suggesting that your child may be dishonest (but if she was, it wouldn't be the first time in recorded history). But she is a kid. They forget things. They misread people and situations. If you go into your parent-teacher conference with your mind all made up about what has happened and what needs to be done going forward, you may wind up with egg on your face. Listen as much—or more than—you speak.

**4. Thinking like a 6<sup>th</sup> Grader.** One of the most beloved teachers I ever knew taught 6<sup>th</sup> grade—a year fraught with hormonal changes, emotions, zits and other tragedies. At her first meeting with all of the parents, she would say, "Your children are getting on a hormonal roller coaster, and they can't help it. It's important for you to stay behind on the ground." Meaning that she was counting on the parents to think like adults and *defuse* the drama—not stir it up. So, before you go in, ask yourself if you're seeing things like an adult who knows that "this, too, shall pass," or if you've been dragged onto the roller coaster.

**5. Refusing to believe that your baby could be wrong.** Even the best kids drop the ball—or the assignment—sometimes. It's part of growing up. If they came into the world perfect, they wouldn't need us, now would they? So don't discount your teacher's take on your child, her academic performance, or her behavior too quickly. Remember—you're seeing them through the eyes of a mother. The teacher is seeing them through a lens that, while not infallible, is probably more objective.

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