

PARENTS AND TEACHERS: WORKING TOGETHER

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Parents and teachers are committed to the development and school success of their children. They both know that success in school is the main pathway to success in adult life. Also that school failure is a strong predictor of other difficulties in school such as behavior problems, and in later life.

These days, the question of children's SCHOOL READINESS casts a long shadow over the land.

Parents are worried and teachers are worried. From day one at school, and even before, parents and teachers both wonder and worry about children's readiness for school and their early learning in school. While teachers know more about child development and the education of children, parents know their child best and are "the experts" on their child.

PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES provide parents and teachers with an important opportunity to compare notes, raise questions, enjoy the child's progress and talk about any concerns that the parent or teacher has about the child. Parents and teachers both wonder whether they are "on the same page?" Conferences are a source of anxiety and apprehension for parents, and also for teachers, as both may be uncertain about how well it will go.

Traditionally, parent conferences have tended to be heavily child-centered and teacher-driven as the teacher discloses all she has learned about the child. Involving parents in a more balanced discussion of their child can create a parent-teacher collaboration that better meets the needs of both parent and child.

Teachers have their own ways of doing things, as we all do. Ongoing periodic communication between parent and teacher establishes the relationship. Then conferences can clarify things and create a more complete picture of the child based on parent and teacher observations, questions and, sometimes, concerns.

I have had the good fortune as a psychologist to work with early childhood teachers who have been open to new ideas. One such idea is having parents complete a questionnaire before the conference. This Child Development Review - Parent Questionnaire (CDR-PQ) that I developed briefly asks parents to describe their child and report any questions or concerns they may have. The teacher then knows, before the conference, what is on the parents' mind and can better prepare for the meeting. Also, completing the CDR-PQ helps parents organize their own thoughts about their child before the conference.

Kathy Ofstedal, former early childhood program director and now St. Cloud State University faculty member, has made very creative use of the CDR-PQ and done some research with it. She has learned things from parents that might otherwise have gone unspoken.

In one family, a 4 year old boy who was doing well at school was driving his mother crazy with his misbehavior at home. Happy ending: Kathy brought information to the conference for the

Mom that helped her effectively modify the child's behavior. Kathy has many such stories about the benefits of being better prepared for her parent-teacher conferences.

Research with parents of three to six year olds in her preschool program revealed an array of parent concerns. Parents of these preschoolers were most often concerned about their children's behavior and discipline---43 percent of parents!.

Less often they raised questions or concerns about their child's adjustment to preschool--15 percent.

Speech and language problems were the commonest concern about children's development---15 percent.

They also used the questionnaire as an opportunity to ask for advice regarding---How to promote my child's self-esteem, help my child overcome fears, among other things---8 percent.

These parents were Asking for Help for a number of common parent concerns. And Kathy was there for them, providing needed help and directing them to additional help when needed.

For Kathy, the questionnaire and the questions parents raised became an integral part of the way she related to and worked with parents.

People, it's all about process. The tools that we use work well only when they are part of a thoughtful ongoing process . Having said that, here, finally, is the Child Development Review - Parent Questionnaire.

The CHILD DEVELOPMENT REVIEW - Parent Questionnaire includes five key questions and a Parent Concerns Checklist.

Your observations of your child and your questions and concerns about his/her health, development and behavior provide important information to talk about at a parent-teacher conference.

Sample Questionnaire

Q1 Please describe your child briefly?

Q2 What has your child been doing lately?

Q3 What are your child's strengths?

Q4 Does your child have any special problems or disabilities? What are they?

Q5 What questions or concerns do you have about your child?

PARENT CONCERNS Checklist

- Health problems
- Immature; acts much younger than age
- Growth
- Hearing and Vision
- Dependent and clingy
- Clumsy; walks or runs poorly
- Passive; seldom show initiative
- Clumsy doing things with hands
- Disobedient; does not mind well
- Habits (Eating, Toileting Sleeping)
- Temper tantrums
- Overly aggressive
- Energy; tired, sluggish
- Can't sit still; may be hyperactive
- Does not pay attention; poor listener
- Not talking well for age
- Speech-difficult to understand
- Timid, fearful, or worries a lot
- Often seems unhappy
- Does not seem to understand well; slow to "catch on"
- Seldom plays with other children
- School Readiness (pre-K) or Other _____
- Slow learner at school

Please comment on any problems you have checked.

Adapted from Dr. Harry Ireton's website [Way to grow Promoting school readiness.](#)