

Session Two

Our Children, Their Schools

ACTIVITY B: Parent-Teacher Conferences

Objectives: Parents will –

- Discover and practice three techniques to foster open communication with their children’s teachers.
- Prepare and practice a format for parent-teacher conferences.

Materials Needed:

- Flip chart paper/markers
- Handouts (pink section)
 - Parent-teacher conferences worksheet
 - Complaints Can Lead to Change
 - A Process for Dealing with Problems at School
- Parent or Student Handbooks from local schools where your parents have students enrolled (facilitator should collect in advance or ask parents to bring. If all schools do not have handbooks, ask for lists of policies, implementation dates, and so forth).

OVERVIEW

During this activity, parents will have the opportunity to talk about their own experiences with parent-teacher conferences and plan for a conference using a prepared worksheet. Following their completion of the worksheet, they will practice conducting a conference and generate a list of “Dos and Don’ts.”

INTRODUCTION

Parents and teachers know students from two very different points of view. They seldom are aware of what the students are like on the other’s “turf.” The more parents and teachers can share information, preferably in person, about a child, the more likely the child will benefit. And while parents are their children’s strongest advocates, they will want to avoid criticizing the teacher and the school in front of their children.

You want to appear united in doing what is best for your children. Parents can also be well served by knowing and understanding their school’s policies and procedures, by involvement in classroom activities or field trips and by talking directly with the teacher or principal about problems and concerns.

ACTION ONE: *Student/Parent Handbooks*

- Distribute copies of parent and/or student handbooks from the school(s) where your parents have children enrolled.

**How many of you were aware such a handbook existed?
How many of you have reviewed it?**

- Ask for a show of hands. Then ask “hand-raisers” why the handbook is important and what benefit it has provided them.

**To help us understand our children’s schools better,
please skim through the handbook and note –**

- **2-3 things about the school or its policies you didn’t know before**
 - **dates for parent-teacher conferences**
 - **process for reporting your concerns about your child.**
- Ask for volunteers to share their experiences with parent-teacher conferences with the group. What worked/what didn’t work for them.

**What can parents do to stay in touch with their
children’s teachers even when they can’t attend parents’
night or conferences?**

- Wait for responses/ideas from the parents. List on flip chart.
- If parents report difficulties with schools, make a list of those difficulties. During ACTION THREE, ask parents to brainstorm solutions. Add your own knowledge. If specific problems emerge, invite a representative from the school to come to your next session. You may also want to distribute the handout, “A Process for Dealing with Problems at School.”

ACTION TWO: *Parent-Teacher Conferences*

Oftentimes preparation for an activity takes the worry out of it and helps us get the results we want. Today (tonight), we are going to review a format for planning for parent-teacher conferences and role play with each other a conference with the teacher.

- Distribute the parent-teacher worksheet (pink section).

First, working with the person next to you, take turns taking the part of the parent and the child and complete the first part of the worksheet. Determine who will be

the parent to start. Give the “child” his/her name and age. The “child” will try to be as realistic in his/her responses as possible.

Next, take five minutes to complete section two of the worksheet by yourself.

Finally, form triads (groups of three): parent/teacher/observer. Conduct a mock parent-teacher conference on the information you have before you. (Having notes is okay.) Remember to mention several positive experiences your child has had in school. In closing, thank the teacher for his/her support of your student and restate any agreements that the two of you have reached in support of your child.

After each parent’s turn, the observer will highlight positive aspects of the conference and suggest ways to make it more effective.

- When each person has played “parent,” invite the groups back together.

Depending on the needs of your group, you may want to extend this activity by utilizing ACTION THREE or substituting it for one of the other actions.

ACTION THREE: *Dealing With Problems*

Oftentimes we are placed in an uncomfortable situation when something negative happens with our children at school. Already we’ve identified several situations. Before we brainstorm possible solutions, I want to suggest that the most important thing you can do is separate the child (or the teacher) from the behavior. The child or teacher is a good person, the behavior is what is causing the problem. And as hard as it may be, remaining calm and matter-of-fact works wonders. Allow me to share a quick problem solving technique (Complaints Can Lead to Change) that we can use when looking at our list.

- Refer to the list of problems identified in your earlier conversation.
- Distribute the worksheet.
- Ask each parent to select one and put it on the worksheet, “Complaints Can Lead to Change.” Allow time for parents to

work (either alone or with a partner) through the worksheet **OR** select one yourself, put it on the flip chart, and engage the group in working through the nine topics.

- Distribute “A Process for Dealing with Problems at School” if appropriate. Review with parents.

REVIEW

- Ask observers to report positive characteristics of their mock parent/teacher conference. List on flip chart. Affirm examples; note similarities.

- Allow for reflection –

What were the difficulties in doing mock parent-teacher conferences? Will it be easier or harder in real life? What will you do differently?

How many are committed to going to the next parent-teacher conference? How about arranging one outside of a regular schedule? (Most teachers are eager for you to call for a conference.)

How is a parent or student resource handbook helpful to you?

How will your children react to this type of preparation for conferences?

How did you feel during this activity? Did you feel differently when you were the parent than when you were the teacher?

Why is it helpful to separate the person from the behavior? Give some examples of how you can use the complaints-change technique at home or in your workplace.